

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 392 871

UD 030 833

AUTHOR Adams, John S.; And Others
TITLE The Path of Urban Decline. The Twin Cities and Ten Other U.S. Metropolitan Areas. What the 1990 Census Says about Minnesota.
INSTITUTION Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Center for Urban and Regional Affairs.
REPORT NO CURA-95-4
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 137p.; For a related document, see UD 030 832.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Statistical Data (110)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Census Figures; Comparative Analysis; Inner City; *Labor Force; Low Income Groups; *Poverty; Resource Allocation; Tables (Data); *Tax Allocation; *Urban Areas; Urban Demography; Urban Problems; *Welfare Recipients

IDENTIFIERS Census 1990; Minnesota (Minneapolis); Minnesota (Saint Paul); *Minnesota (Twin Cities)

ABSTRACT

This report is the second in a series on What the 1990 Census Says about Minnesota. A group of urban specialists gathered to examine a set of metropolitan areas that share important features that were thought to be related to central-city decline as evidenced in Minnesota's Twin Cities, Minneapolis and Saint Paul. Six cities were identified as substantially similar to the Twin Cities, and four others were identified as substantially different. Variables studied in all 10 cities included one direct measure of poverty and 4 other characteristics considered indicators of weak labor force attachment: (1) the proportion of persons in each census tract living in households below the poverty level; (2) the proportion of households receiving public assistance; (3) the proportion of families and subfamilies headed by females; (4) the proportion of persons 16 to 19 years of age not in school and not working; and (5) the proportion of males 16 and older unemployed or underemployed. Examination of census and other data in these areas indicates that the Twin Cities area is in better shape than many comparable cities. While the inner-city cannot be said to be risk-free, troubled areas in the core cover only a fraction of the total city area. The fiscal disparities law that redistributes tax revenues in the area is excellent, but tax-base sharing alone cannot address all the inner city's needs. (Contains 7 tables, 70 figures, and 30 references.) (SLD)

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The Path of Urban Decline

ED 392 871

What the 1990 Census Says About Minnesota

*By John S. Adams,
Barbara J. VanDrasek,
and Laura J. Lambert*

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The Path of Urban Decline

The Twin Cities and Ten Other
U.S. Metropolitan Areas

John S. Adams, Barbara J. VanDrasek,
and Laura J. Lambert

The second in a series on:
What the 1990 Census Says About Minnesota

A publication of the Center for Urban
and Regional Affairs, 330 HHH Center,
301 19th Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55455.

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1995

Publication No. CURA 95-4

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Edited by Ruth Hammond

This report is the second in a series on *What the 1990 Census Says About Minnesota*. Others in the series are:

Income and Poverty by John Tichy and William J. Craig.

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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following people in compiling this monograph: Susan Weiner and Mitch Tobin of the Urban Institute, Washington, D.C.; Ruth Hammond, who edited the monograph; Michael Munson, Regan Carlson, and Wayne Ersbo of the Twin Cities' Metropolitan Council; and, at the University of Minnesota, Will Craig and Judith Weir of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs; Brent Allison, director of Automated Cartography and the Information Center in the John R. Borchert Map Library; and Elvin Wyly of the Department of Geography.

Executive Summary

During the past decade, the areas within Minneapolis and St. Paul that seem to be intensely troubled with poverty, social problems and deteriorating physical infrastructure have been expanding at rates that alarm civic leaders and the public at large. In public discussions of these trends, two questions that come up repeatedly are whether the recent experience of the Twin Cities parallels the experiences of other American urban areas, or whether there are distinctive features of these local trends.

To address these questions, a group of urban specialists from the Metropolitan Council, the city planning departments of Minneapolis and St. Paul, and the University of Minnesota's Department of Geography, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, and Center for Urban and Regional Affairs gathered in late spring 1993. The group discussed ways to shed more light on poverty-related trends in the Twin Cities, and on how they compare with similar trends elsewhere in the United States. Clearly, a close look at the data was needed.

This study follows from that discussion. We decided to examine a set of metropolitan areas that share important features that we felt may be related to central-city decline, mainly their age of settlement and development, and the composition of their local populations. Areas identified as roughly similar to the Twin Cities metropolitan area are Denver, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, and Seattle. A second set of metropolitan areas identified as substantially different from the Twin Cities metropolitan area in terms of age, spatial structure, population composition, economic base, and other aspects also was analyzed in the study to provide contrast and to facilitate future research on conditions in individual metropolitan areas. These are Atlanta, Chicago, Phoenix, and St. Louis.

To clarify the similarities and the differences between the Twin Cities area and the ten other metropolitan areas across the United States, we decided to identify the number of census tracts exhibiting high rates of five selected variables for 1970, 1980, and 1990. The variables chosen include one direct measure of poverty and four other characteristics thought to be indicators of weak labor force attachment, which is a concomitant of poverty. They are: 1) the proportion of persons in each census tract living in households* below the poverty level; 2) the proportion of households receiving public assistance; 3) the proportion of families

* A *household* includes all the persons who occupy a housing unit (this category excludes mental hospitals, nursing homes, military barracks, college dormitories, and other institutions). A *family* consists of a *householder* (the person who fills out the census questionnaire, usually the person or one of the persons in whose name the home is owned or rented) and one or more other persons living in the same household who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption.

and subfamilies headed by females; 4) the proportion of persons 16 to 19 years of age who were not in school and had not graduated from high school; and 5) the proportion of males 16 and older who were unemployed or underemployed (Table 1).

Poverty. Minneapolis and St. Paul are small cities within a sprawling metropolitan area of about 5,000 square miles. In 1970, six census tracts at three different locations—two in Minneapolis and one in St. Paul—displayed extreme poverty rates of at least 40 percent with at least one tract having as high as 60 percent of residents living in poverty. In 1980, the number of tracts with a poverty rate of 40 percent or more had risen to eleven tracts, and by 1990 the count had reached thirty, which was 5 percent of all tracts in the 1980 Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The rate of increase in extreme poverty tracts for the Twin Cities was neither the fastest nor the slowest growing among the MSAs we compared, but fell somewhere in the middle of the group.

Public Assistance. The number of Twin Cities area tracts with high rates of households receiving public assistance seems average. In other metropolitan areas with average rates, however, the number of such tracts is stable or dropping. In this regard, the Twin Cities area is strikingly different, showing a steady increase in such tracts. The reason for this increase remains undetermined. It might be due to an attractive state welfare system with liberal eligibility criteria, or to a promising employment situation in the Twin Cities that draws in-migrants faster than they can be absorbed and employed, or to the distribution of low-priced housing opportunities that disproportionately concentrate populations receiving public assistance, or to social and economic circumstances in other metropolitan areas that keep their totals lower than the Twin Cities, or to other unknown factors or combinations of factors. Along with the Twin Cities, the neighboring MSAs of Milwaukee and Chicago have also experienced high rates of increase in the number of tracts with high levels of dependency on public assistance.

Female-headed Families and Subfamilies.* By 1990 the national average of families and subfamilies that were headed by a female reached 16.5 percent. Median tract values were between 20 and 30 percent in all but three of our study areas—the Twin Cities, Pittsburgh, and Seattle, which were all below 20 percent. Tracts where the proportion of female-headed families exceeded 70 percent were common in all areas except Phoenix and Seattle. Twin Cities patterns were comparable to the other areas. Averages were lower, but trends moved in the same direction as in other areas.

* A *subfamily* is either a married couple with or without never-married children under 18 years old, or one parent with one or more never-married children under 18 years old, who are living together in another person's household and are related to either the householder or the householder's spouse; the householder in these cases is not part of the subfamily, however. A female-headed subfamily, therefore, might be a woman and one or more of her children living with a relative other than her husband, when that relative is listed as the householder.

Table 1. Number of Census Tracts with Selected Characteristics in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1970-90

Metro Areas*	Poverty (20- < 40%) and Extreme Poverty (≥40%)			Receiving Public Assistance (≥30%)			Female-headed Families (≥40%)			High School Dropouts (≥50%)			Male Unemployment/ Underemploy- ment (≥60%)		
	1970	1980	1990	1970	1980	1990	1970	1980	1990	1970	1980	1990	1970	1980	1990
Atlanta	32 18	52 36	59 35	8	20	20	21	74	110	4	7	4	8	24	19
Chicago	189 44	264 134	267 183	59	194	210	121	315	428	32	46	27	17	122	150
Denver*	33 7	33 8	57 11	3	4	3	9	26	41	3	12	5	3	8	3
Indianapolis*	20 1	32 5	45 10	0	2	0	7	35	49	7	10	7	3	3	2
Kansas City*	50 7	65 12	72 25	3	7	7	19	60	100	6	12	5	2	11	20
Milwaukee*	43 8	56 19	48 59	9	35	55	14	75	115	1	8	6	6	11	27
Mpls.-St. Paul	36 6	45 11	60 30	4	6	12	17	57	78	1	5	3	8	10	7
Phoenix	40 11	35 14	63 22	0	2	6	3	15	24	4	17	5	12	21	22
Pittsburgh*	58 11	74 19	113 35	17	29	25	29	70	121	2	2	6	5	34	36
Seattle*	13 3	20 3	24 6	3	3	3	6	26	17	4	5	3	4	6	3
St. Louis	45 17	63 26	76 37	13	31	30	29	82	113	3	10	6	1	22	31

* Metropolitan areas deemed similar to the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area.

Source: Urban Institute Under Class Data Base. Calculations by the authors.

High School Dropouts and Male Unemployment/Underemployment. The number of tracts in the Twin Cities area with high rates of high school dropouts falls well below average, whether the Twin Cities is compared with similar metropolitan areas or with those judged to be significantly different. The country has been doing a better job lately of keeping people in school and helping them to graduate, although whether a high school diploma is still a reliable indicator of educational achievement and job preparation is a matter of debate. Because we did not analyze what proportion of the population falls into the category of children ages 16 to 19, we do not know how any shift in that ratio may have affected the overall percentage that are graduates in the three census-count years being considered.

The number of tracts with high male unemployment/underemployment is very low, reflecting both the generally low unemployment rates in our metropolitan area and the geographic concentration of the unemployment that does exist.

Conclusions

How well the Twin Cities area stands up in comparison to other metropolitan areas with respect to rates of increase and geographical concentrations of poverty, dependency on public assistance, female-headed families and subfamilies, high school dropouts, and male unemployment and underemployment depends upon which trait is being considered and which metropolitan area the Twin Cities is being compared with. The rate of increase in the number of tracts with high levels of welfare dependency is well above average in the Twin Cities, but the reasons are unclear. On the other measures of levels or of rates of change, the Twin Cities area appears to be average or below average. The trends showed no substantial or consistent differences between the group of metropolitan areas deemed similar to Minneapolis-St. Paul and the group thought to be different.

The initial concerns that led to this study focused on what appeared to be an increasingly rapid expansion of poverty concentrations in the Twin Cities. What are the potential consequences of that expansion for not only the residents of poor areas, but for neighboring communities? What will this change mean for the continuing vitality of the metropolitan area as a whole? A decade from now, might the Twin Cities resemble a smaller-scale Detroit, with vast inner-city areas abandoned by commerce, industry and white middle-class families; with failing central-city schools and services; and with children at risk of growing up without the resources to prepare them for productive lives?

After approaching the last question as we did—by analyzing summary statistics for entire metropolitan areas—the short answer appears to be no. Our metropolitan area is in better shape on most of these important measures than are several other comparable areas. It is likely, however, that the analysis done in this study is insufficient to address the question of whether our metropolitan health and vitality will continue.

The longer and more informative answer is that a complex set of local and nonlocal factors contributes to the concentration of poverty in any given metropolitan area. Each city and its surrounding urbanized area are unique in many aspects, and there is a complex set of explanations for why the social and economic health of any of these areas drifts into decline. Each area has its own story, reflecting the benefits and shortcomings of its particular regional setting, demographic makeup, local leadership, institutional arrangements, human capital, and economic resources, among a host of other important factors.

Certain problems—including those examined in this study—seem to be common to all large metropolitan areas. Whether and when the growth or extent of these problems constitute metropolitan decline, however, can be assessed only within the context of the place in question. It is entirely possible for a metropolitan area to include large pockets of poverty and social disruption and still to grow and thrive, as long as deficits in these poor areas are outweighed by assets in others, so that the balance sheet allows the region to remain an active and competitive participant in the economy beyond its boundaries. In such cases, intra-metropolitan inequality should be the pressing concern. In other cases, resources beyond the troubled areas are insufficient to buoy up the health of the entire metropolitan region. When that happens, jobs, income, and people shift elsewhere, leaving in their wake an untended, deteriorating urban area.

The Twin Cities metropolitan area has its own unique story as well. Located within a region that has a stable, diversified economy, it has a rich endowment of human capital and natural resources, good transportation and communications, a healthy industrial base, and a legacy of confident, creative, and entrepreneurial local leaders and citizenry. These assets help to explain our favorable ranking in relation to the eleven metropolitan areas in this study, despite the growth of troubled zones in our core cities.

The newspaper headlines that cause us the most worry often refer to problems within the central cities of metropolitan areas. Such problems arise when those cities become pressed beyond their resources to deal with dependent populations, deteriorating infrastructure, and demands upon their services from nonresidents who carry their wages and tax payments out of the cities to be spent elsewhere in the metropolitan area.

Summary metropolitan area statistics, if not read carefully, may mask the true conditions and trends in central cities. Some central cities, such as Indianapolis, are coterminous with their central-county boundaries, which means they can draw upon resources from an area extending beyond their original boundaries. The cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, in contrast, cover only about 2 percent of their total metropolitan area. Consequently, troubled zones near their cores cover a substantial fraction of these two cities' total areas. In some metropolitan areas there are institutional arrangements that facilitate not only a free flow of people and resources across municipal boundaries, but a shared responsibility among all municipal members for the health and well-being of all areas of the metropolitan area. The Twin Cities has an excellent fiscal disparities law that redistributes tax revenues from richer

communities to poorer communities, but tax-base sharing alone will fall far short as a remedy for intrametropolitan inequality.

Given the gravity of the problems within certain troubled neighborhoods, the resources of the central cities alone will be inadequate to address them. The fate of any metropolitan area is closely tied to the health of its central cities and the support it gives those cities. If the problems of the cities reverberate broadly enough to create a metropolitan area-wide deficit—in jobs and income, in the commercial and industrial base, in a skilled, educated work force and citizenry—then that region may indeed be called in decline.

Introduction

This study portrays geographical expressions of poverty and weak labor force attachment in the Minneapolis–St. Paul area compared with ten other metropolitan areas in the United States. We discuss how poverty is defined for purposes of official measurement, geographical portrayal, policy analysis, and public policy discussion. We examine how geographical expressions of poverty and related conditions in most of these eleven urban areas expanded and intensified during the period from 1970 to 1990.

We discuss how geographically-based definitions of poverty and weak labor force attachment are used to frame scholarly debate and proposals for public response that sometimes are counterproductive and yield unintended outcomes. Finally, we review the differing perceptions that fuel the underclass debate and the attention focused on low labor force participation as a major source of social and economic difficulty for a substantial and growing fraction of households in our central cities.

Specific goals of this study are as follows:

1. to describe the extent of areas within the Twin Cities metropolitan area that display significant levels of poverty and of various measures reflecting weak labor force attachment;
2. to portray and interpret trends in the spatial expression of concentrated poverty and weak work force attachment between 1970 and 1990 in the Twin Cities area;
3. to compare the recent Twin Cities experience with that of ten other American metropolitan areas—six of them judged similar in age, spatial structure, and socioeconomic composition to the Twin Cities, and four others judged to be quite different; and
4. to offer a commentary on the conceptual frameworks and census tract measures used in research, policy analysis, and program initiatives aimed at addressing structural problems of poverty and effective and rewarding work force participation.

We conclude with a modest policy analysis that considers possibilities for addressing poverty problems by means of adjustments in state and metropolitan policies and programs.

Part I. Background: Perspectives on Urban Poverty

The Decline of American Central Cities

The Role of Cities in the National Economy

For over a century, cities have been the focal points of social and economic development in the United States. The destinations of millions of late nineteenth-century immigrants, cities provided sites for expanding industry and accommodations for its laborers. They continue to serve as the primary reception areas for new groups of in-migrants, just as they continue to provide protective, socializing milieus for newcomers. Cities are markets, bulk transfer points, and transportation nodes. They are, at once, cauldrons of political and intellectual ferment, leaders in change, and bastions of resistance.

Throughout much of our history, cities as such seldom had much political power. The power that did reside in cities was in rough proportion to their primacy in the American economic system. This power allowed urban governments to demand and get the resources they needed to keep their cities vital and growing, thereby enabling them to serve both their residents and the national economy. Much of this was happenstance. The economic well-being of cities themselves was maintained for the most part unintentionally, as a consequence of two factors: their participation in larger market systems and their role as home to workers. Thus, when workers were in distress, as in the Great Depression, the federal government channeled aid programs to cities to help workers. Again, when white middle and working classes were threatened by degradation and social disorder in inner-city slum areas, the federal government acted to clear those slums, erecting mass public housing and introducing social welfare programs to improve living standards and impose order in such areas.

During the post-World War II era, when cities again began to grow rapidly and spread outward in response to an increase in newly formed households, these same white working and middle classes—in whom urban political power had resided—began to move ever outward from the city centers. As new suburbs developed, young families were lured toward these symbols of what quickly became known as “the American dream.”

Over several decades, the concentration of political interests within single jurisdictions dispersed and diffused over many areas. The sway that central cities once held over developing metropolitan areas—especially from the 1930s to the 1960s—diminished. Each

municipality had its own self-interests and had to compete with others for state and federal resources. Through the 1960s, an expanding national economy allowed most new areas to grow and thrive. Some cities managed to expand their political boundaries through annexation and thus kept these new communities and resources within their jurisdictions. In many other cases, the outflow of resources—people, jobs, capital, tax base, investment—from central cities, along with increasing political tensions over race and opportunity, has changed central cities from vital, efficient sites of production, culture, and progress to sites of conflict, fear, destruction, and despair. Moreover, the consequences of this process and the policy responses to it have become concretized, self-exacerbating, and self-perpetuating over the course of three decades, locked into their current malignant form by the laissez-faire urban policies of the federal government throughout the 1980s (Cisneros 1993, 17, 29).

Inner-City Decline: The Public Debate

The current public debate about urban problems has been brewing for three decades and is, in fact, only the latest round in a cyclical process of concern about degraded conditions in American cities.* The history of industrialization contains a history of urban blight and social pathology, and writings by scholars are remarkably similar throughout the decades in their depictions of the urban poor. In the 1920s and 1930s urban ghettos were seen as breeding grounds for illicit, immoral and illegal activities. That perception gave impetus to urban renewal programs that razed inner-city neighborhoods and constructed mass public housing projects, which sit squarely in the center of many blighted urban areas today.

The public concern about urban decline has several bases. The first is a general concern about the declining labor force involvement of poor inner-city residents and the future labor force of the nation. In the face of higher skill levels demanded by the changing technology of many employment sectors, training and preparation available to students in declining areas are falling behind. Central-city schools funded by a declining local property tax base find themselves inadequately staffed and funded to deal with a changing student population. Children who are educated in schools with inadequate resources often emerge unprepared to participate productively in the labor force. Thus they can neither support themselves nor contribute to the economy, and are likely to become dependent upon public resources for their basic needs.

In addition, while schools have become a primary locus of socialization for the nation's youth, many inner-city schools find the mechanisms of socialization impossible to maintain in the face of growing disciplinary problems, often exacerbated by the dearth of special and extra-curricular programs available to students. The growing spatial isolation of inner-city youth also may diminish their contact with other sources of help, advice, and mentoring that might facilitate their entry into the work force.

* For a review of the past century of this process, see: Robert A. Beauregard, *Voices of Decline: The Postwar Fate of U.S. Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1993).

A second source of concern is the perception of the social impacts of a growing economically dislocated population. The absence of formal employment opportunities leads some to turn to the informal economy, often involving extralegal activities that have impacts far beyond the local community. The crime and victimization often associated with this second economy fall most heavily on local residents, but have repercussions for the city at large as well. Increasing personal and property crime further devalues real estate in declining areas and gives additional impetus to the out-migration of households able to leave. Spreading fear about crime and concern about the devaluation of real estate beyond poor neighborhoods influence household relocation decisions city-wide. Working- and middle-class households examine their budgets and their tax bills, and often choose to leave jurisdictions with increasing social welfare and public safety burdens.

Finally, changing public perception about the poor as a group has changed the political climate regarding urban policy in recent years. Liberal attitudes regarding aid to inner-city poor people have shifted toward a more conservative stance in the face of popular press depictions of angry, destructive minority youth and chronically dependent, fragmented families. Increasing popular use of the term "underclass" in tandem with a general resurgence of conservatism in the country has changed public receptivity to ideas about poor people—and especially about poor people of color. Leading advocates of this attitude shift tap into a deeply rooted tendency to regard "them" as a homogeneous—and somehow deficient—group.

Poverty and Decline

The process leading to urban decline is not a mystery. Middle- and working-class households migrate out of the inner cities, taking their incomes and job skills with them. Consumer services and other employment opportunities follow them, as do many community institutions that are supported primarily by households with discretionary income. The concomitant out-migration of consumer power has an equally important impact, not only over the array of economic goods and services locally available, but over the quality of institutions such as schools, community organizations, government services, and the like.

The wealth status of households left behind suffers as demand for deteriorating inner-city housing declines and real estate values fall. A "spatial mismatch" develops between workers and their skills and appropriate, accessible, living-wage jobs (Ginzberg 1993). Where no suitable assistance is available for job retraining or relocation, unemployment and public dependency grow.

Housing Issues

The social geography of our cities is closely related to the dynamics of the housing process and the deteriorating physical infrastructure of our inner cities—the very places where the poor and those weakly attached to the work force are most highly and visibly concentrated.

The housing stock of most American metropolitan areas is sharply stratified geographically, with older, cheaper, and less desirable units clustered near the downtown core, and newer, more desirable, and valuable housing grading outward into the newly built-up suburban edges. Different households' access to housing opportunities is regulated by income, wealth, and access to credit and information about housing alternatives, along with preferences and prejudices regarding the types of neighbors one prefers to live among or away from (Adams 1987).

People with money and information enjoy great freedom of choice in deciding where to live. But when resources diminish, choices are restricted. Cheaper owner-occupied units or low-priced rentals near the urban core are the predominant housing destination for those lacking assets or reliable income streams. Thus, the geographical distribution of housing opportunities determines in large part the distribution of households according to their wealth and purchasing power. And since most of America's cheapest urban housing is concentrated at our metropolitan centers, financially deprived households concentrate there as well.

The dynamics of the American urban housing process work this way. When households relocate within the metropolitan area, they typically move to better housing, and as they move up to better housing, they usually resettle closer to the edges of the urban area. National public policy subsidizes this outward movement of homeowners in two major ways: deductibility of mortgage interest and real estate taxes from taxable personal income and the opportunity to shelter capital gains on residential real estate. Additional subsidies to the suburbs take the form of highway and road improvements and utility extensions that are paid only in part by the occupants of the new housing, plus government-sponsored mortgage insurance and mortgage guarantee programs that lower the interest rates paid by home buyers.

The main beneficiaries of these tax breaks and other subsidies are middle- and upper-middle-class American households who obtain cheap or sometimes free housing when their annual net cash outlays for housing are offset by substantial residential asset accumulations. Upper-bracket houses gain in market value as large numbers of households try to crowd into a smaller number of attractive available units. Demand in that segment of the market exceeds supply, so prices rise at rates that usually exceed inflation (Adams 1979).

This financial outcome motivates middle- and upper-middle class households able to take advantage of such unearned largesse to do so, but as they do they leave behind households less well off than themselves. Meanwhile, small, older, cheaper owner-occupied and rental housing that is at the lower-priced end of the housing inventory and concentrated in the central cities loses value. The lower-income, lower-wealth households trying to maintain their houses fight a losing battle because those who can afford to leave for better housing usually do so. Landlords watch their real estate asset values slipping away. The out-migration is usually not matched by a proportionate in-migration of community newcomers and others moving up, so demand drops, prices fail to match general inflation, and asset values decline.

By means of this process, capital values steadily shift out of low-income neighborhoods and into wealthier areas. Lower income households end up with expensive housing—a direct result of national and state tax policies. The clear policy result is that wealth benefits that are reaped by the suburbs come partly out of inner-city neighborhoods and from the pockets and balance sheets of people who live and own property there. This is the way metropolitan housing markets work in the Twin Cities and elsewhere (Adams and VanDrasek 1993). It is legal but unfair, and it leads to geographical concentrations of poor households, and to an apparent aggravation of social problems thought to be associated with poverty and weak labor force attachment.

Policy Approaches

Current policy debate pits two conflicting interpretations of poverty against each other. One side presents a picture of deprivation due to structural economic change, which results in a population of “deserving poor” worthy of public assistance. This analysis implicates the public tax subsidies that have allowed and encouraged the development of an economy dominated by the private sector, and more recently the spatial and sectoral restructuring of that economy to the disadvantage of inner-city residents with low mobility. Concomitantly, because of a long history of segregated residential development in cities, this process nearly always affects inner-city minority groups disproportionately. Since public subsidies created this unfair situation, public subsidies also should provide the remedy.

Some suggested remedies include reinvesting in poor areas, especially in work and educational opportunities, so that inner-city residents might have a better chance of joining the work force. Restructuring public assistance programs also is seen as crucial to remove current disincentives to work. Finally, redressing the spatial mismatch of workers and jobs would be aided by removing racial barriers to housing and employment mobility.

These remedies fail to recognize how the process of urban residential segregation is set in motion, and how the cycle of unearned gains might be disrupted by removing some of the subsidies that flow to affluent suburbanites through their housing. Moreover, few policy-makers have been willing to tax some or more of the unearned capital gains on real estate that perpetuate the unequal distribution housing values across metropolitan areas.

On the other side of the debate is a depiction of the “undeserving poor”: those who are poor by their own hands, having developed “deficient” norms and values that keep them from taking advantage of the opportunities that do exist (Katz 1989). Some argue that these “normative deficiencies” are of long standing, inherent in the chronically poor; others blame life in the ghetto environment for defeating aspirations. But in both cases the outcome is the same: unemployable, unsalvageable people who cannot be helped until they decide to help themselves.

The policy suggested by this behavioral interpretation is the reduction of public expenditures on behalf of these poor, including welfare programs, education, job training, and the like. One difficulty with this proposed solution, however, is to identify this subset of the poor to begin with, and then to cope with the consequences of removing the social safety net from that population.

The Local Case of the National Problem

The Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis are in an especially—perhaps uniquely—vulnerable position within the current public debate about central-city decline. We have for several decades publicly prided ourselves on maintaining exceptionally livable cities, with historically progressive governments at the state, regional, and local levels, and with community leaders who have a knack for getting together to address and creatively solve our problems. Now, amidst a national debate on urban problems from which we at first remained aloof, we find local leaders comparing our metropolitan area with the Milwaukee or Detroit of only a decade or two ago and suggesting that the Twin Cities area is following the same inexorable path of decline, for the same reasons. Suddenly our bragging rights have been called into question, and we have been challenged to examine honestly conditions in our own community, and perhaps to update our self-image.

The Twin Cities area enjoyed a reasonably healthy economy throughout the post-World War II era. After 1945, new, mostly single-unit housing appeared at such a steady and vigorous pace that the Metropolitan Council (the Twin Cities' metropolitan planning agency) at one point predicted that the local population would reach 4 million by the year 2000. The combination of a strong economy and an exceptionally active suburban land development and house-building industry was both a cause and a consequence of large numbers of people being drawn into the Twin Cities economy from the surrounding region and from other American metropolitan areas. This in-migration supplemented local natural increase.

During those post-war decades the central cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul spawned at least four distinct tiers of suburbs, fed by local natural change and by in-migration into the area, mostly from the Upper Midwest. Rapid trickling down of new housing vacancies from middle- and upper-middle-class suburbs into the central cities softened prices for owned housing and rentals in the core areas, allowing increasing numbers of lower-income households to concentrate near the core in reasonably good quality housing.

As obsolete housing units come to the end of their useful lives and are ultimately vacated and abandoned, both cities have done a good job clearing the sites, which are then made available for redevelopment or left permanently vacant. Nevertheless, in an eleven-county metropolitan statistical area of about 5,000 square miles in 1990—Minneapolis accounted for only 55 square miles of land area, and St. Paul 53—the share of the total area accounted for by the central cities continues shrinking at the same time the cities' share of the

region's old and inexpensive housing concentrated within cities rises. This phenomenon leads to increasing spatial concentrations of poverty and other social ills, a geographical and social pattern that seems to recur in other major cities across the United States.

Since the 1990 U.S. Census results appeared, planners and legislators in the Twin Cities have begun wondering whether the spatially-defined trends in local poverty and related social malaise are edging toward unmanageable proportions. They publicly raise the question of whether the Twin Cities region—especially in the central cities and some of the first-tier suburbs—is becoming like many other American metropolitan areas where the social and physical fabric appears to have broken down in self-perpetuating cycles of dependency and hopelessness. Some analysts and observers claim that spatial patterns of poverty and labor force detachment are steadily developing in the Twin Cities area in ways closely resembling patterns in other major U.S. metropolitan areas.

One might say that this suggestion of trouble was news to many local leaders, that the metropolitan area, and in fact the state, had long been resting on their laurels, content with the positive self-image established in the public mind in the 1970s by the popular press. Things were changing around us, but our attention was elsewhere. We were revitalizing the downtowns and the riverfront, building and maintaining highways, and worrying about our high-tech industrial base. State government was trying to reverse economic decline in non-metropolitan areas, and our exemplary regional metropolitan government was losing its clout.

Some people did know, and did say, that urban problems were becoming critical. Neighborhood and community organizations knew. Schoolteachers and administrators knew. Parents and social workers and crime victims knew. The balance of political power, however, never has been weighted in favor of these groups in our metropolitan area. Only recently, therefore, has the full attention of governments from the state level on down been called to these issues, because only recently have state legislators taken the lead in making that happen. Now a full agenda of policy changes is under debate in the state legislature, while local jurisdictions are becoming more aware of their links to each other's fates. If the State of Minnesota is to maintain its acclaimed quality of life, it cannot have a primary urban area that is in serious decline and is being likened to Detroit and other icons of blight.

Now that attention is focused on our urban problems, the claims that we are on the road to serious deterioration must be tested. Evidence supporting the idea that the Twin Cities is like other metropolitan areas, and thus vulnerable to the same fate, is piecemeal and unsystematic, and remains too inconclusive to serve as the basis for policy. A group of scholars and government officials from the University of Minnesota and the Metropolitan Council met in spring 1993 to discuss the need for better information. Following from that discussion, the idea arose for a study that would compare the Twin Cities with several other metropolitan areas on the five poverty-related measures of concern, with the goal to either support or dispel the notion that our metropolitan area is, indeed, following along the path of serious decline to which other metropolitan areas have fallen prey.

To this end, a set of ten U.S. metropolitan areas was selected for comparison with the Twin Cities. Six were deemed comparable to, and four different from, the Twin Cities in their age, development history, economic base, population composition, and other features. We know that each metropolitan region is unique—more than the sum of its parts—and so each ought to be studied individually in order to uncover the exact nature of its problems. In this study, however, our goal is simply to compare rates of expansion and areal extent of certain demographic variables in these eleven metropolitan areas over two decades. We stop short of offering explanations for the patterns or growth rates, and address only the question of how the Twin Cities metropolitan area compares, in 1990, with some of the larger metropolitan areas that are coping with problems that we would like to avoid.

A full analysis of the causes of urban problems in the Twin Cities and elsewhere is beyond the scope of this work, and yet the choice of variables selected for comparison requires us to place this study within the context of the ongoing public debate about that very topic. The variables examined herein are the same ones used by most researchers doing work on urban poverty and the urban underclass. Thus, our decision to use these variables may seem to constitute an implicit acceptance of the underclass concept, or at least a willingness to examine our eleven metropolitan areas using that conceptual framework. We find it important, therefore, to comment on our own views of this research area, and to explain our use of the so-called underclass variables.

Concepts of Poverty and the Underclass

Historic Views of Poverty: Areas vs. People

Scholars at the University of Chicago, who had been leaders in the field of urban research for decades, greatly influenced conceptualizations of urban structure and process in the early twentieth century. The legacy of that scholarly tradition continues to inform current work and current policy. Following on the work of nineteenth-century sociobiologists, urban studies scholars depicted the city metaphorically as a social organism, with natural areas in which people with similar traits congregated. Thus, residential segregation was seen as part of the natural order of things. When people's traits changed, they moved to different areas to be with people like themselves.

The link between status and residence was established. People who lived in various areas were believed to do so because they belonged there by virtue of their social, economic, or racial/ethnic characteristics. The idea of urban social engineering through urban redevelopment thus became an integral element of policy. The characteristics of people were inseparable from the characteristics of areas, lending credence to an ecological fallacy—that traits that show up in the aggregate in an area are shared by all residents of that area. The possibility of structurally-defined areas of economic activity and opportunity, shaped by

forces other than the characteristics or behavior of the diverse groups of people who lived in them, was no part of the equation.

Evolution of the Underclass Concept

With rapid industrialization during the interwar decades, the expansion of low-skill manufacturing jobs outpaced the growth of the labor supply. There was a great migration of African Americans out of the South to seek work in northern industrial cities. Part of the postwar legacy of the 1950s was the opening up of additional employment sectors for minority groups, but in the same era GIs returned to take back jobs vacated during the war years. This reemployment of veterans displaced many from their wartime jobs, including females and African Americans. At the same time, technology was changing—also in part as a legacy of the war—and the technical requirements for employment in many sectors were rising.

The traditionally less-educated working poor—disproportionately minorities—were hit hardest by these structural changes, and the declining economic fortunes of these people were manifest in expanding central-city ghettos. Observing this phenomenon in the early 1960s, Gunnar Myrdal (1962) referred to the growing number of sectorally and spatially isolated long-term poor as a new “underclass.” For another decade, the term underclass was used most often to describe economic features of poverty. The increasing visibility of the urban poor through the 1970s and 1980s led scholars and journalists to apply the term more loosely to groups of people thrown into chronic, long-term poverty by structural changes in the economy, but especially to those who behaved in ways thought to be socially disruptive (Aponte 1990). The logic of the original concept became convoluted, as such behavior was seen increasingly as a prior cause of, rather than a predictable response to, economic displacement and social isolation.

By the late 1980s, popular concern about growing inner-city problems pushed researchers to look more energetically for an operational definition of the underclass. Eventually, following on work by sociologists Erol Ricketts and Isabel Sawhill, many scholars came to adopt a behavioral definition of the underclass as those people living in areas with a “coincidence of a number of social ills including poverty, joblessness, crime, welfare dependency, fatherless families, and low levels of education or work-related skills.” They wanted to focus particularly on behaviors “likely to inhibit social mobility, to impose costs on the rest of society, or to influence children growing up in an environment where such behaviors are commonplace” (Ricketts and Sawhill 1988, 318-19).

Ricketts and Sawhill’s work has greatly influenced urban research, despite several flaws in its internal logic. The authors’ operational definition fails to distinguish between people (the underclass) and the underclass areas in which they live, between characteristics of individuals and households, or between willful and imposed behaviors. Criminal behavior is an individual trait. Yet because crime rates are measured as incidents reported per capita within areal units, in the public mind, all residents of certain high-crime areas may be thought to be

associated with crime. The other attributes the authors use to define the underclass confound victimization (living in an area where negative behaviors are commonplace) with both individual and household behaviors "at variance with those of mainstream America (such as joblessness, welfare dependency, unwed parenting, criminal or uncivil behavior, and dropping out of high school)" (Ricketts and Sawhill 1988, 317). Even this latter set of behaviors mixes individual behavior that is likely to be deliberate (criminal conduct) with what often is an externally imposed condition (joblessness).

Moreover, all of these measures are studied using census data aggregated to the tract level, where each tract could contain up to 2,000 households or 8,000 individuals. Thus, there is no way to ascertain whether these characteristics are coincident within individuals, households, or even neighborhoods in any given tract. Areas where these measures are high can be identified, but the people who manifest the behaviors cannot. Yet the definition of the underclass still embodies the notion of "someone in an underclass area who engages in various socially costly behaviors." Individuals engaging in socially costly behaviors while living outside of underclass areas fall outside of this category.

Poverty is not considered an important part of the definition of the underclass. Ricketts and Sawhill attempted to define the underclass behaviorally, not economically. Yet areas exhibiting underclass traits correspond with about 60 percent of areas of extreme poverty (tracts in which 40 percent or more of the population lives in households below the poverty level), and an even higher percentage of poor areas if tracts of 20 percent poverty are included. The match between extreme poverty and three underclass variables (female-headed families and subfamilies, public assistance, and marginal male employment) is extremely high (Hughes 1989). A fourth underclass variable examined in this study, a high rate of school dropouts, is not as closely correlated with extreme poverty.

The inherent inconsistencies and contradictions in the underclass definition have not been resolved. Using geographic (i.e., tract) data to attempt to identify a group of people falls prey to the ecological fallacy (Hughes 1989). Policies based on identification of underclass areas often treat all residents of these areas as though they were part of the underclass—engaging in, or likely to engage in, socially costly behaviors. This confusion of ideas helps to perpetuate stereotypes, casting doubt on all residents of socially troubled areas.

Some researchers have used poverty rates, along with Ricketts and Sawhill variables, to define "distressed areas" in cities, an approach that at least begins to shift the focus of discussion back toward residential segregation and the structure of the economy (Kasarda 1993a). Other writers, such as Herbert Gans (1990a), have suggested that since the problems involved in defining the underclass by using social characteristics of residents seem unresolvable, it would be better to abandon this approach altogether. Robert Aponte (1990) recommended concentrating on persistent poverty as the basis of current urban problems, as was done when the term underclass first came into use. This way poverty is clearly defined and is easily studied with available census data.

In this study, we have examined separately poverty and the four characteristics used to define the underclass, but we chose not to map areas where they coincide. We have not sought to identify underclass areas, or to count the underclass in our sample cities. We have used the Ricketts and Sawhill variables, however, because we agree that they do represent barriers to labor force attachment, a close concomitant of poverty.

The Urban Institute Under Class Data Base, 1970-90

The data source for this study is the Urban Institute's Under Class Data Base,* which contains social, demographic, economic, and housing data on tracts in the United States from the 1970, 1980, and 1990 censuses. Census tracts are locally determined geographical units originally intended to contain about a thousand households, although they now typically include between 2,500 and 8,000 persons. Tracts are meant to approximate neighborhoods by capturing a relatively homogeneous group with respect to residents' social characteristics, economic status, and housing conditions, and by being bounded by well-defined physical features such as major streets, rivers and streams, and principal highways.

The Urban Institute uses the census tract as the best available surrogate for the neighborhood. These small-area data allow analysts to investigate characteristics and to speculate about apparent influences of a person's immediate surroundings on her behavior and opportunities. Debate continues over the relative importance of a person's neighborhood as an influence on his vulnerability to poverty (as compared with the influence of family, local labor market, effects of discrimination, etc.), but it is reasonable to assume that a person's environment plays a role (Wilson 1987; Clark 1992; Crane 1991).

While the social context of an individual's life has many dimensions, several of them appear to be influential locally and observable spatially, implying that geography matters in regulating social and economic opportunity. Thus, "underclass areas" are geographic areas in which unusually high concentrations of adults live who are detached from the labor force and earnings. This social context, it is asserted, may contribute to the economic vulnerability of the entire population living within it. The Urban Institute uses the term "underclass population" to refer to the population residing in underclass areas. It uses another term,

* The Under Class Data Base was developed at the Urban Institute by Isabel Sawhill and Erol Ricketts in 1989. Initially containing data for 1980 only, the data base was later expanded to include 1970 and 1990 data under the supervision of Ronald Mincy and Susan Wiener. The creation and distribution of the data base have been funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, as part of the Persistent Poverty Research Project. Inquiries should be directed to Susan Wiener at the Urban Institute, 2100 M Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037; or phone (202) 857-8627.

"concentrated poverty population" to refer to the population residing in concentrated poverty areas (Mincy and Wiener 1993, 3). These areas are urban census tracts wherein 40 percent or more of the population reside in households that received cash incomes below the poverty line. Because underclass areas contain unusually high percentages of adults detached from the labor force, and absence of earnings is associated with very low income, concentrated poverty areas and underclass areas largely coincide.

When the 1990 Census data became available, the Ricketts and Sawhill measures were examined by the Urban Institute to estimate the growth of the underclass population during the 1980s (Mincy and Wiener 1993, 3). Researchers wondered whether the ninety-two-month economic recovery during the 1980s had resolved the problem of labor force detachment. Could they measure and continue to find zones within our metropolitan areas containing large proportions of residents still unattached to the labor force in 1990? If this problem had persisted during the 1980s and into the 1990s, what were the policy implications?

The researchers defined underclass areas by the geographical concentration of multiple social characteristics known to act as barriers to labor force attachment. Using the census measures selected by Ricketts and Sawhill (1988), researchers identified an underclass area as a tract with high proportions of each of the following:

- unemployed/underemployed males (over age 16, working at least one week but fewer than 26 weeks in the year prior to the decennial census);
- teenagers who are high school dropouts (ages 16 to 19, not in school and not graduated from high school);
- families or subfamilies headed by females; and
- households receiving public assistance (General Assistance [GA], Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC], or Supplemental Security Income [SSI]).

"High" in Urban Institute usage means at least one standard deviation above the mean for the nation as a whole on that indicator—a stringent definition because a tract must score high on all four indicators to be counted as an underclass area.

On average, 59 percent of men in underclass areas were unemployed or underemployed in 1990, more than twice the level (23 percent) in a typical American neighborhood. In 1990 the U.S. high school dropout rate for persons 14 to 24 years of age was 11 percent, while in underclass neighborhoods it averaged 38 percent. Female-headed families constituted 16.5 percent of all U.S. families in 1990, but almost two-thirds of all families living in underclass neighborhoods. Female-headed families are five times more likely to be poor than families with two parents present—due largely to single mothers' tendency toward weak labor force attachment. Finally, the fraction of households in underclass areas receiving public assistance was 300 percent higher than the average U.S. census tract. Beneficiaries of public assistance by definition have weak attachment to the labor force, and for many the structure of the welfare system constitutes a major barrier to making the transition from welfare to

work. This definition of the underclass, it is argued, captures the fraction of American families living in the most severely distressed communities (most of them urban) in our society.

A powerful feature of the Under Class Data Base is its ability to match tracts across all three decennial census years, enabling users to examine changing tract characteristics between 1970, 1980, and 1990. A unique tract identification code applies to the same physical area in all three census years for most census tracts. But because the boundaries of some tracts changed between the decennial censuses (either by splitting into several tracts—typical in new suburban areas; merging with other tracts—as occasionally happens in redeveloped core areas; or appearing for the first time—as when a previously untraced county is added to a metropolitan statistical area), a methodology was developed by the Urban Institute to link all such tracts and their associated data to 1980 tract boundaries.*

* Tracts added to the MSAs between 1980 and 1990 were not included in the maps of metropolitan area tracts. The study area is limited to the 1980 MSA.

Part II. The Case Studies: The Twin Cities Compared with Ten Other Metropolitan Areas

Site Selection and Methodology

Two questions immediately arose in formulating this study. First, what kind of data might be used in a comparative metropolitan area study? And second, which metropolitan areas are appropriate for comparison? We decided to use data from the decennial U.S. Census of Population and Housing for the years 1970, 1980, and 1990, and to analyze the data geographically at the census tract level for central cities and immediate surrounding areas. From the Under Class Data Base, data were compiled on poverty and the four underclass variables (households receiving public assistance, female-headed families and subfamilies, high school dropouts, and male unemployment/underemployment) for the tracts in the eleven chosen metropolitan areas. Three census periods, 1970, 1980, and 1990, were covered. It is not our goal here to engage in research on the underclass; that is, to identify areas where the four variables coincide. The four variables are examined individually, however, because it seems clear that they are linked to poverty through their effect on labor force participation. We also found it more informative to map tracts according to percentages of the variables, rather than to identify those one or more standard deviations from the metropolitan average.

The selection of a manageable set of metropolitan areas for comparison was complicated, and the solution arrived at—based on our previous comparative work on American cities—was more impressionistic than highly analytical. Metropolitan areas differ in significant respects from one another—by age of origin, timing of growth, nature of their site, present size, social composition, bases of economic vitality through the years, patterns of areal spread, and density of their population and housing. As noted earlier, the growth and change of these phenomena in each metropolitan area must be studied individually in order to formulate appropriate local urban policies, as each city is unique.

For this study, we identified six metropolitan areas that are roughly similar in several important respects: Denver-Boulder, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Milwaukee-Racine, Pittsburgh-Beaver Valley, and Seattle-Tacoma. These were approximately the same population size in 1990 (Table 2). Like the Twin Cities, the six metropolitan areas experienced their first vigorous economic development around the middle of the nineteenth century. Pittsburgh is the oldest and Denver the youngest of this set, but all developed similar business

Table 2. Size, Population, and Age of Housing of Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1990

Metropolitan Areas	1990 Central City Area*/Metro Area (square miles)	Metro Area Population, 1990 (millions)	All Housing Units, 1990 (millions)	Percent of All Units Built, 1980-Mar. 1990	Percent of All Units Built, Pre-1940	Median Year Built
Atlanta, Ga. MSA	132/5,122	2.8	1.2	37.3	5.7	1975
Chicago, Ill.; Gary, Ind.; Lake County, Wisc. CMSA	227/5,619	8.1	3.1	11.6	25.7	1958
Denver-Boulder, Co. MSA	153/4,503	1.8	.8	24.2	10.5	1971
Indianapolis, Ind. MSA	362/3,071	1.2	.5	18.4	18.7	1964
Kansas City, Mo.-Kans. MSA	312/4,988	1.6	.7	19.9	16.5	1965
Milwaukee-Racine, Wis. CMSA	96/1,793	1.6	.6	10.1	28.0	1956
Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn.-Wis. MSA	55 + 53/ 5,051	2.5	1.0	21.8	20.5	1965
Phoenix, Ariz. MSA	420/9,204	2.1	1.0	39.9	1.8	1977
Pittsburgh-Beaver Valley, Pa. CMSA	56/3,835	2.2	1.0	8.6	34.3	1952
Seattle-Tacoma, Wash. CMSA	84/5,892	2.6	1.1	25.6	15.2	1968
St. Louis, Mo.-Ill. MSA	62/5,331	2.4	1.0	16.5	21.3	1961

* The area of the first central city in the MSA title—whose boundaries are delineated on accompanying maps—is given. For Minneapolis-St. Paul the area of each central city is given separately. Each figure includes dry land and land temporarily or partially covered by water.

NOTES: MSA—Metropolitan Statistical Area. CMSA—Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area, containing two or more primary Metropolitan Statistical Areas which, if freestanding, would be labeled MSAs.

Source: U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1993. *1990 Census of Population and Housing. Detailed Housing Characteristics. Metropolitan Areas*, Section 1, Table 1. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office.

and political leadership, and all were settled predominantly by people of European ancestry. Among the six, all but two—Seattle and Pittsburgh—lie in the Middle West. Regardless of their early economic bases, by the end of the twentieth century the six metropolitan areas featured similar economies internally, with most of them functioning solidly within the North American Manufacturing Belt. Moreover, each of them emerged as a high-order metropolitan commercial and professional center for a major tributary market area.

In our judgment, the Twin Cities metropolitan area can be added comfortably to this set of six, as it is similar in total population and housing characteristics. One category in which the Twin Cities compares favorably to the six comparable metropolitan areas is in age of housing stock. In 1990 the median year in which all existing Twin Cities area housing had been built was 1965. Among the comparable areas, the medians for Milwaukee and Pittsburgh (the cities that have experienced slow growth in recent decades) were 1956 and 1952 respectively. The Denver area, with its recent history of expansion, contained the newest housing, with a median year built of 1971.

For contrast, we identified four additional metropolitan statistical areas judged to be significantly different from the Twin Cities in one or more respects, such as size and populations trends: Atlanta, Chicago, Phoenix, and St. Louis. Among the eleven comparison areas, the two cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul were the smallest in area, totaling 108 square miles, so older neighborhoods within their borders inevitably made up an unusually large fraction of their total area. At the other extreme in areal size are Chicago (227 square miles), Kansas City (312), Indianapolis (362), and Phoenix (420).

The two Sunbelt cities—Atlanta and Phoenix—for the most part are newly built places, with most of their present size achieved in recent decades. For example, the Atlanta metropolitan area had a population of 1 million in 1960, an increase of 40 percent over 1950. The Phoenix metropolitan area had a population of 664,000 in 1960, having doubled its population over the previous decade. Consequently, in 1990 the median year built for housing in Phoenix was 1977; in the Atlanta area it was 1975 (Table 2).

St. Louis had the opposite experience. It emerged as the economic capital of the Mississippi River Valley in the early nineteenth century and became one of the nation's largest cities by century's end. But it peaked in economic prominence early in the twentieth century, and has struggled through various stages of social and economic decline ever since. The city had a population of 750,000 in 1960, but during the previous decade it had lost more than 12 percent of its population while the metropolitan area gained only 20 percent. With only 62 square miles of land area, the city was and still is filled with a high-density, aging housing stock. In 1990 the median year built for housing in St. Louis was 1961.

Chicago differs from the Twin Cities and from the other places in the comparison set because of its huge size. With an area of 227 square miles and a population size second among American cities throughout most of the twentieth century, the city has always ranked in a

class by itself. Because of its tremendous expansion at the end of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, and its relatively slow growth in recent decades except at locations in and around the central business district, the median year built of its housing stock stood at 1958 in 1990. This is significantly older than the Twin Cities housing stock. Among the metropolitan areas used in the comparisons, Chicago's housing is surpassed in age only by that of Pittsburgh and Milwaukee.

Statistical Sources and Base Maps

The goal of this study is to assess similarities and differences in concentrated poverty and attributes reflecting weak labor force attachment in eleven U.S. metropolitan areas in 1970, 1980, and 1990. This is accomplished by examining tract-level statistics and tract-based maps of each of the study areas, and then comparing the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area with the ten other areas.

The choice of the three years was based on the timing of the decennial censuses, the results of which provide the only comparable tract-level data from metropolitan area to metropolitan area. Since there usually are some changes from census to census in the location of certain tract boundaries as tracts near urban cores are consolidated and those in newly developing areas are subdivided, we used the Urban Institute Under Class Data Base, which adjusts all tracts to their 1980 boundaries, and then reconfigures 1970 and 1990 census data to fit stable 1980 tract boundaries.

We wanted to compare visually the maps of the Twin Cities area with maps of other metropolitan areas. To make visual comparison easier and more effective, we prepared tract-level base maps at a uniform scale, selecting the map scale so that: 1) three maps of each central city with its adjacent suburban areas (one map for each census year) could be placed on a single 8½-by-11-inch sheet;* and 2) each of the eleven metropolitan areas could be handled the same way at the same scale.

The eleven metropolitan areas being compared were different not just in the extent of the measures of poverty and labor force detachment, but in the extremes reached on each measure within tracts. The highest level of each measure found in at least one tract in a given metropolitan area is indicated by the legend beside each map. For example, on the measure of poverty, all tracts with a poverty rate of at least 40 percent are indicated on the maps in black. But in Chicago in 1990, as the legend indicates, tract poverty rates were as high as 100 percent, whereas in Indianapolis in the same year, no tract had a poverty rate higher than 50 percent.

* Our maps depict 1990 boundaries for all central cities. In this study, because we were concerned particularly with an examination of the metropolitan cores, the peripheries of the MSAs extend beyond the map windows.

The complexity of the issues involved led us to limit this study to the most straightforward comparisons possible—of change in the number of tracts, and in the shape of the distribution of each variable for each time period. We stopped short of preparing composite maps to check for tract-level coincidence of the variables because of our reservations about the underclass concept. Nevertheless, simple visual comparison makes it clear that there is a great deal of overlap among the variables in most of our sample cities.

The Limitations of Tract-Level Data

The incidence of poverty and related variables, and their portrayal using tract statistics, say nothing about the geographical concentration of these characteristics below the tract level. When census statistics report that 40 percent of a tract's population lives below the poverty line, for example, we do not know whether that means: 1) four of ten people throughout all neighborhoods in the tract; or 2) four neighborhoods with 100 percent poverty in one part of the tract, and six others with 0 percent; or 3) some blend between these extremes.

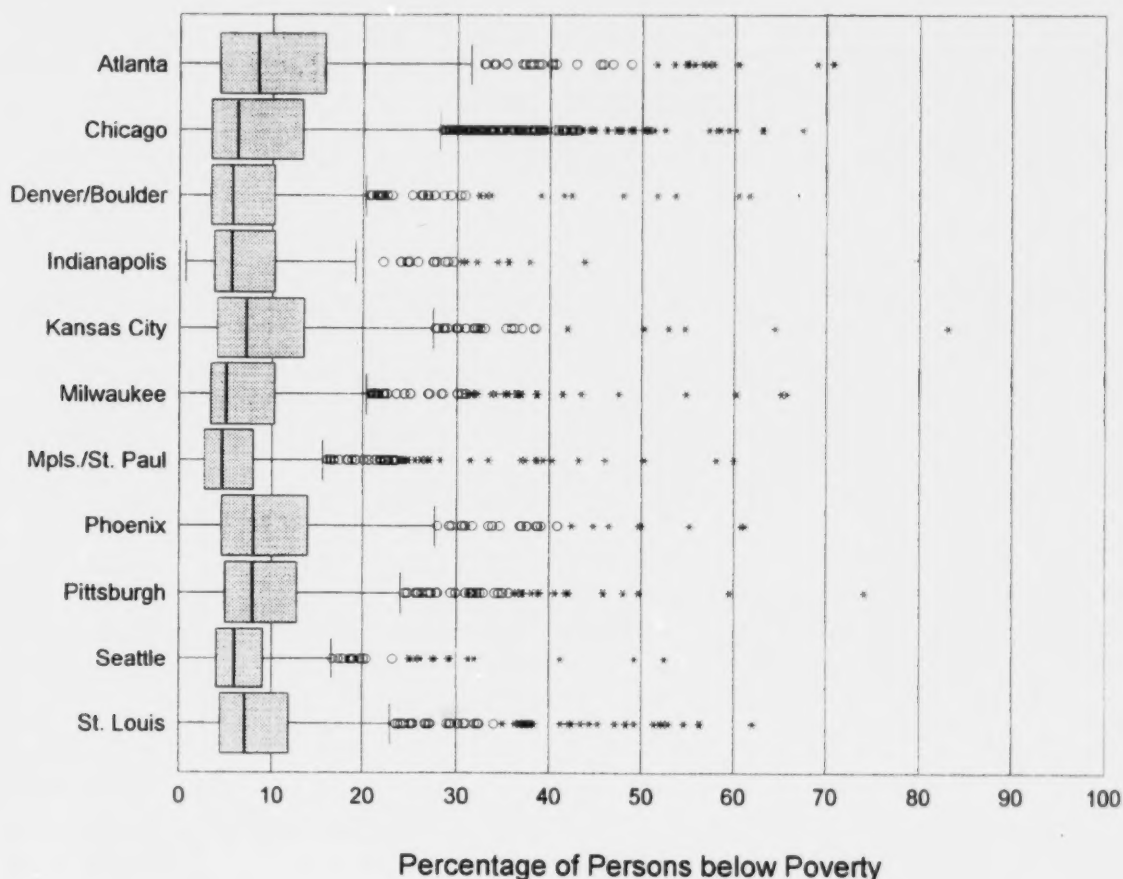
In south Minneapolis, city blocks are typically five acres (660 by 330 feet) subdivided into twenty-six lots, each 40 feet wide. If each lot has one house with an average of 2.5 to 3.0 residents, blocks would average 65 to 78 people. A tract with 4,000 people would contain about fifty to sixty blocks—in other words, several neighborhoods, many of them differing significantly from one another despite efforts of the Bureau of the Census and local census advisory committees to locate tract boundaries so as to maximize housing and population homogeneity to the extent feasible.

Statistical Analysis

In the analysis of census statistics in this study, each observation is a census tract. Each variable of interest (for example: tract poverty rate, 1980) is an estimated average for families, households or persons residing in the tract. The Bureau of the Census usually provides a single measurement per variable per tract, per census year. Sometimes, with such variables as family income or household income, the Bureau of the Census reports the number of families or households falling within each of several income classes in a tract in addition to a measure of central tendency such as a median value or an arithmetic mean. The census, by law, must avoid reporting personal data for individual households or persons.

Each census tract variable has a metropolitan area-wide distribution. For example, if a metropolitan area has 360 tracts (as did the Atlanta area in 1980), then a variable such as percentage of persons below poverty in the tract in the specified census year involves 360 cases or observations for that variable, from which mean and median values may be calculated for the distribution representing the array of tracts. Besides measures of central tendency, each distribution also has a variation about the mean or median. This study uses four measures of central tendency and dispersion on the boxplots that follow (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Poverty Rates in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1970



1. The median rate of each variable for census tracts within each MSA is identified by the vertical bar within the shaded box on the graph. For example, the median tract in the Atlanta MSA had 8 percent of its residents below the poverty level in 1970. In other words, half the tracts in the Atlanta MSA that did not fall precisely at the 8 percent poverty rate had a poverty percentage of lower than 8 percent, and half had a poverty percentage higher than 8 percent.
2. The left-most boundary of the box marks the tract at the 25th percentile of the variable being measured and the boundary on the right marks the tract at the 75th percentile. The box width or *spread* is the range between the 25th and 75th percentiles of cases; thus, the box depicts 50 percent of all tracts. For example, within the box portraying poverty rates in the Atlanta MSA in 1970, the tract at the 25th

percentile had 4 percent of persons below poverty; the tract at the 75th percentile had 16 percent of persons below poverty. So the spread is from 4 to 16, which equals 12 percentage points. Thus, 25 percent of tracts in the Atlanta MSA had estimated poverty rates below 4 percent and 25 percent had rates above 16 percent in 1970.

3. To give us a picture of the shape of the distribution outside that shaded box, the spread of the observations between the 25th and 75th percentiles (the width of the box) is multiplied by 1.5. Observations falling beyond that threshold above the 75th percentile (farther to the right of the box than 1.5 times the spread) are defined as *outliers*. A line extends to the right of the box, ending with a *whisker* at the location of the largest observed value of the variable being measured that falls below the first outlier.

Using the boxplot of the Atlanta MSA in 1970 as the example again, the box spread of 12 is multiplied by 1.5, which equals 18. This figure is added to the percentage of people below poverty for the tract at the 75th percentile. For the Atlanta MSA, that number is 16. So any census tracts in the Atlanta MSA with a poverty rate of more than 34 percent (18 plus 16) are considered outliers. However, in 1970 Atlanta did not have any census tracts with a poverty rate of exactly 34 percent. Thus, the whisker terminating the line on the high end falls at 32 percent, which is the highest poverty rate found in an Atlanta MSA census tract in 1970 that is not an outlier.

Another threshold is defined at 1.5 times the spread (box width) to the left of the box, or below the 25th percentile. Observations with values below that point are outliers on the low end. The line drawn to the left ends with a whisker at the location of the smallest observation above the first outlier. For most of our distributions the whisker at the low end falls on zero, and so is not visible on the graph. The greater the dispersion of values in the distribution, the greater the number of outliers identified and portrayed by this method. Almost all of the outliers fall at the high end and very few at the low end for all five variables measured in this study. For instance, in 1970, none of the eleven metropolitan areas had outliers on the low end in the measure of poverty rates, and all but the Indianapolis MSA had census tracts with poverty rates of 0 percent. For the Indianapolis MSA the lowest observed value of the poverty rate in a census tract was 1 percent.

4. A second threshold above and below the box is defined on the distribution at points 3.0 times the box spread. Census tracts whose rates on a given measure are more than 3 box lengths from the upper or lower edge of the box are defined as *extreme outliers*. On the boxplots these extreme outliers are designated by asterisks.

Outliers whose values are between 1.5 and 3 box lengths from the upper or lower edge of the box are represented by circles. For the Atlanta MSA in 1970, all tracts above the 52nd percentile for the measure of persons below poverty are extreme outliers and are therefore marked on the boxplot as asterisks, while census tracts with

poverty rates from just above 34 percent to 52 percent are marked as circles. To arrive at the 52nd percentile, the box spread of 12 is multiplied by 3, which equals 36, and then 36 is added to 16 percent (the poverty rate at the 75th percentile).

The symbolization on the bar chart thus enables us at a glance to identify extreme values of the variables within each metropolitan area and to assess just how far removed they are from the values of the area as a whole.

Poverty in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1970–90

After completing our analysis, we found no notable distinctions—either in the extent of tracts or in rates of change—between the sets of similar and dissimilar metropolitan areas for the five poverty-related traits measured. In the discussion of our results, therefore, we present all eleven metropolitan areas as a single set.

Official Definitions of Poverty

Poverty means the state or condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support. The term denotes serious lack of the means to maintain a decent existence. Families and unrelated individuals in the United States are classified as above or below the poverty level using a poverty index created by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and subsequently revised in 1969 and again in 1980 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, 440 ff.). This official poverty index is based solely on monetary income and ignores the fact that many low-income persons receive noncash benefits such as food stamps, Medicaid, and publicly assisted housing. The index is based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 1961 Economy Food Plan and reflects the different consumption requirements of families based on their size, composition, and ages of family members. Poverty thresholds are updated annually to reflect changes in the Consumer Price Index.

In order to test the effects of definitional criteria on the size of the poverty population in the United States, the Bureau of the Census analyzed alternative definitions of poverty that add or subtract income components, then estimated the populations that would be included under alternative criteria. Types of income included in one or more of the alternative definitions are: 1) cash income, excluding capital gains or lump sum payments, before taxes; 2) capital gains; 3) government cash transfers; 4) Earned Income Tax Credit; 5) value of employer contributions to health insurance plans; 6) value of food stamps; 7) subsidy value of school lunches; 8) subsidy value of housing assistance; 9) fungible values of Medicare and Medicaid coverage (that is, the benefits are counted as income to the extent that they free up resources that could have been spent on medical care); and 10) imputed net return on equity in owner-occupied housing.

Additions to and exclusions from income are not the only means that can be used to adjust the poverty rate; there are also alternative ways to account for inflation. The Consumer Price Index is the usual price deflator, but an alternative measure of inflation uses estimates of the cost of renting equivalent housing in order to assess home ownership costs (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, 441).

Persons Below the Poverty Level

According to Bureau of the Census estimates of poverty based on the standard definitions, there were 33.6 million persons, or 13.5 percent of the U.S. population in 1990, with 1989 cash incomes below the poverty level. That percentage was a weighted average of major population subgroups, each of which experienced varying rates of poverty: whites—10.7 percent; blacks—31.9 percent; Hispanics—28.1 percent; all children under 18—19.9 percent; white children—15.1 percent; black children—44.2 percent; Hispanic children—39.7 percent; and persons 65 and older—12.2 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, Tables 735, 736, 739). Poverty rates vary regionally, from lows of 12.2 percent in the Northeast and 13.2 percent in the Midwest, to 14.3 percent in the West and 16.0 percent in the South (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, Table 738). At a more detailed geographical scale, 1989 poverty rates were lowest in New Hampshire (6.4 percent), Connecticut (6.8 percent), and New Jersey (7.6 percent), and highest in Mississippi (25.2 percent), Louisiana (23.6 percent), and Arkansas (19.1 percent) (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, Table 741).

Poverty levels vary widely among the nation's large cities, with 1989 rates ranging from lows in Virginia Beach (5.9 percent), Cleveland (8.5 percent), and San Jose (9.3 percent), to highs in Detroit (32.4 percent), New Orleans (31.6 percent), Atlanta (27.3 percent), and Baton Rouge (26.2 percent) (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, Table 742).

In 1959, 18.5 percent of all American families—almost one in five—lived below the official poverty line. By 1978 the fraction had been reduced by more than half, to 9.1 percent. In the past decade, the fraction has fluctuated between 10 and 12 percent.

Mapping the geographical distribution of tracts that have 20 to 39 percent of their population in poverty, as well as tracts with 40 percent or more of their population in poverty, seems to be the best way to illustrate exactly where the poverty is concentrated, even though we cannot say with any confidence where the poverty is located within the tracts.

Poverty Tracts in Central Cities

Atlanta. In 1970 Atlanta's high poverty tracts were clustered in the oldest part of the city around downtown, with a slight spillover into the part of eastside Atlanta that lies in De Kalb County (Figure 2).^{*} A corridor of poverty, deteriorating housing, and a high concentration of black residents extended northwest of downtown through the city and Fulton County to the city limits and the Cobb County border (Hartshorn et al. 1976). By 1990 areas of concentrated poverty had spread southward toward the airport, westward, and in an expanded region east of downtown in De Kalb County. The northeast (on either side of Peachtree Street, containing Phipps Plaza, Lennox Square, and Perimeter Mall) continued to feature middle- and upper-income tracts without interruption during the two decades. In sum, poverty areas covered only a small fraction of the City of Atlanta's 132 square miles in 1970, but by 1990 they covered close to half the city and had spread to nearby county areas south, east, and northwest of the city limits.

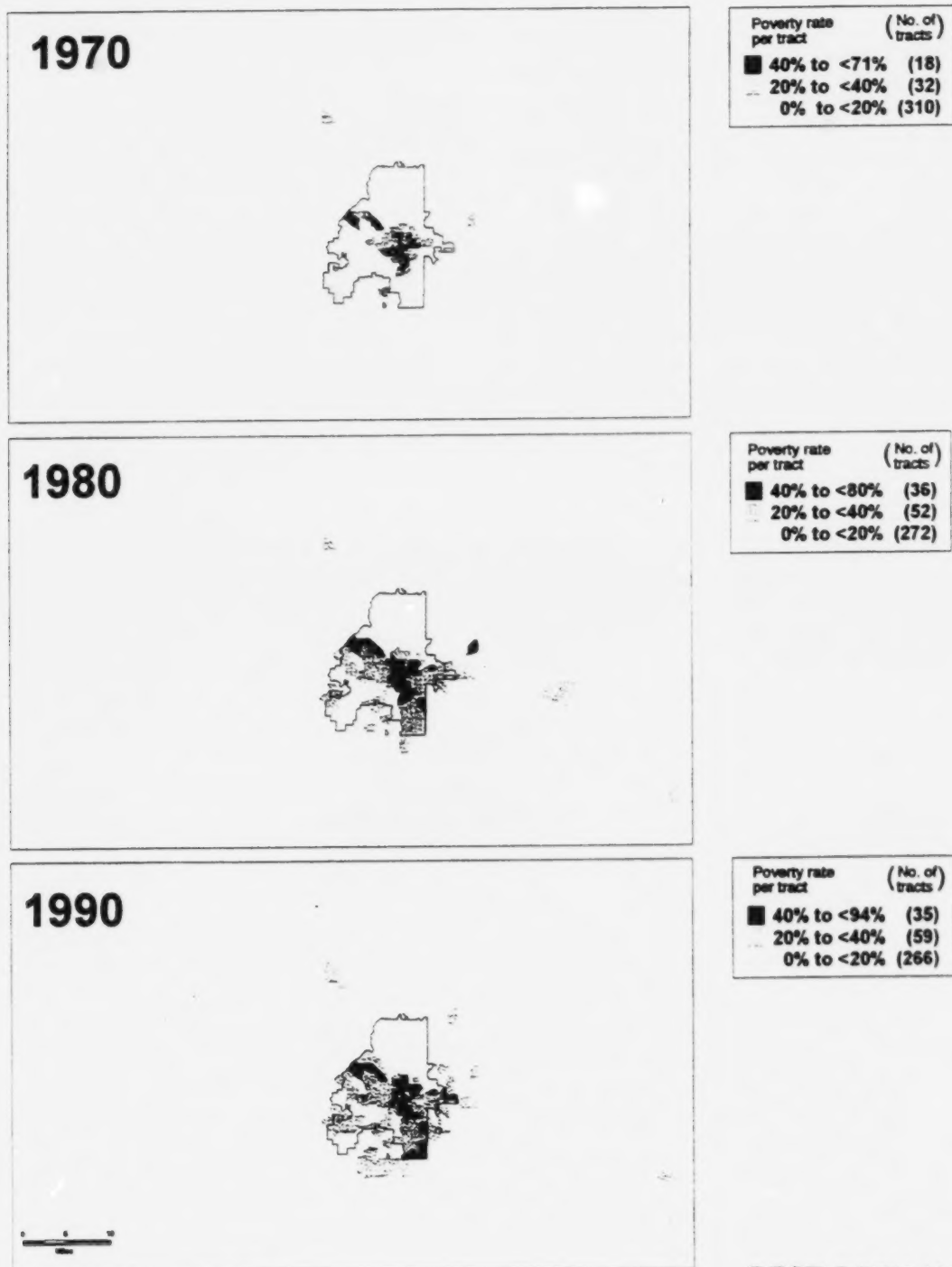
Chicago. Chicago's poverty areas covered perhaps a fifth of the city in 1970, but by 1990 nearly half the city's neighborhoods lay in or immediately adjacent to poverty areas (Figure 3). One prominent concentration lay directly south of the downtown; another was west and northwest of the city center. The rate of areal expansion seems to have been faster in the 1970s than in the 1980s, but poverty appears to have intensified within poverty areas during the 1980s.

Denver. Areas of extreme poverty within the City of Denver remained relatively unchanged between 1970 and 1980, accounting for only a tiny fraction of the city's 153 square miles (Figure 4). Moderate poverty areas expanded over a broad area after 1970, spilling beyond the city limits into adjacent Denver County. The extensive area of poverty east of the city in 1970 represents residents in the vicinity of Lowry Air Force Base and Buckley Naval Air Station.

Indianapolis. The Indianapolis case illustrates how boundary changes affect the severity of governance and management problems faced by a municipality (Figure 5). In 1960 the City of Indianapolis covered only 71 square miles, but by 1980 its boundaries had been extended to be coterminous with Marion County, expanding the city's area to 362 square miles—more than six times that of either Minneapolis or St. Paul. As a result of the boundary expansion, the poverty areas of 1970, even though significantly expanded in all directions, accounted for only about a tenth of the city's area in 1990.

^{*} The legend next to each map shows the number of tracts within each category—the percentage of households or persons exhibiting the trait in a particular tract. The top category is truncated with the exact value of the highest percentage tract on that map; therefore the percentages will not be consistent over the three census years depicted in each set of maps. In the case where no tracts fall into a particular category (i.e., no tracts over 40 percent), that category is not shown in the legend. (The first instance of this is in Figure 18.)

Figure 2. Persons in Poverty, Atlanta, 1970-90



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Figure 3. Persons in Poverty, Chicago, 1970-90

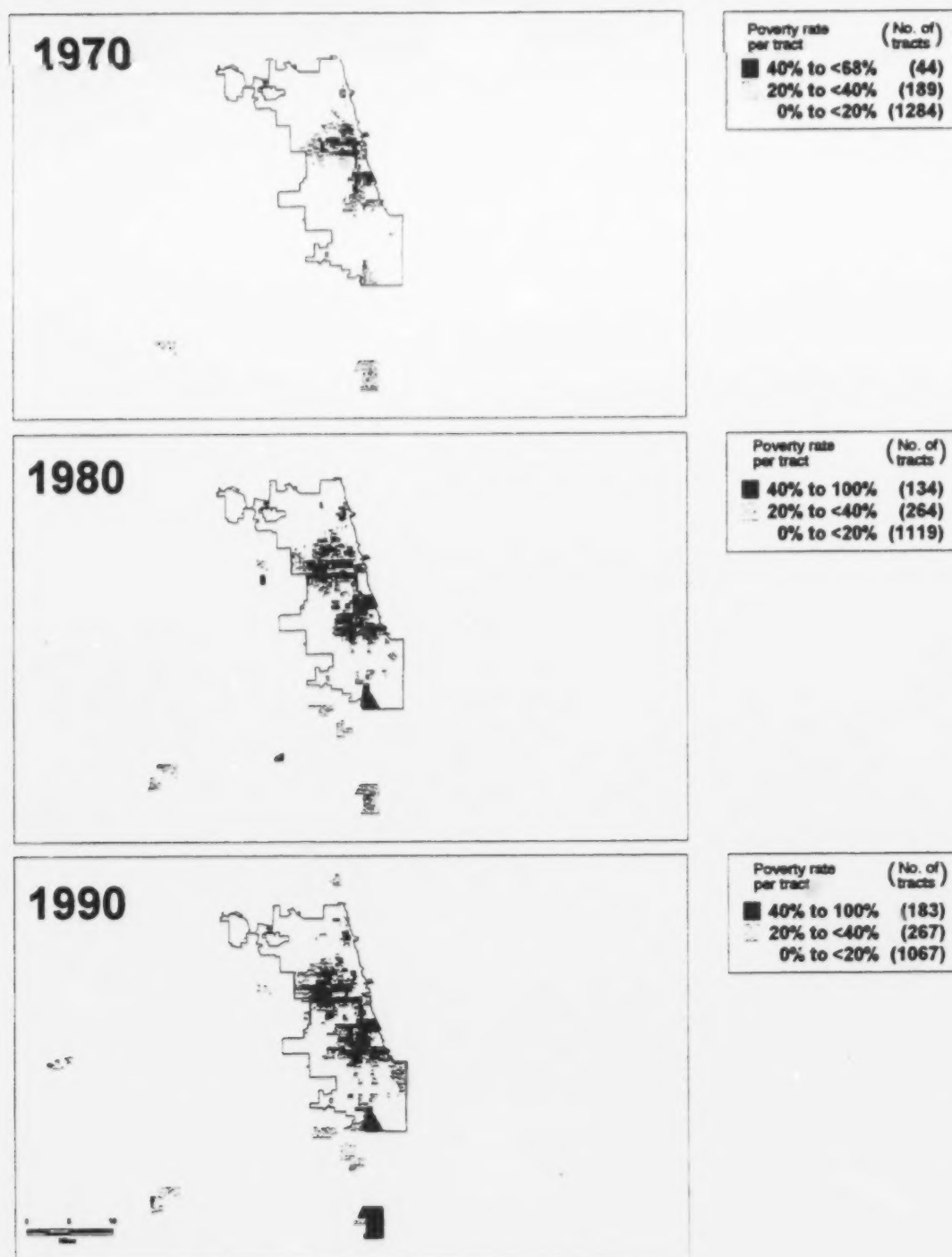


Figure 4. Persons in Poverty, Denver, 1970-90

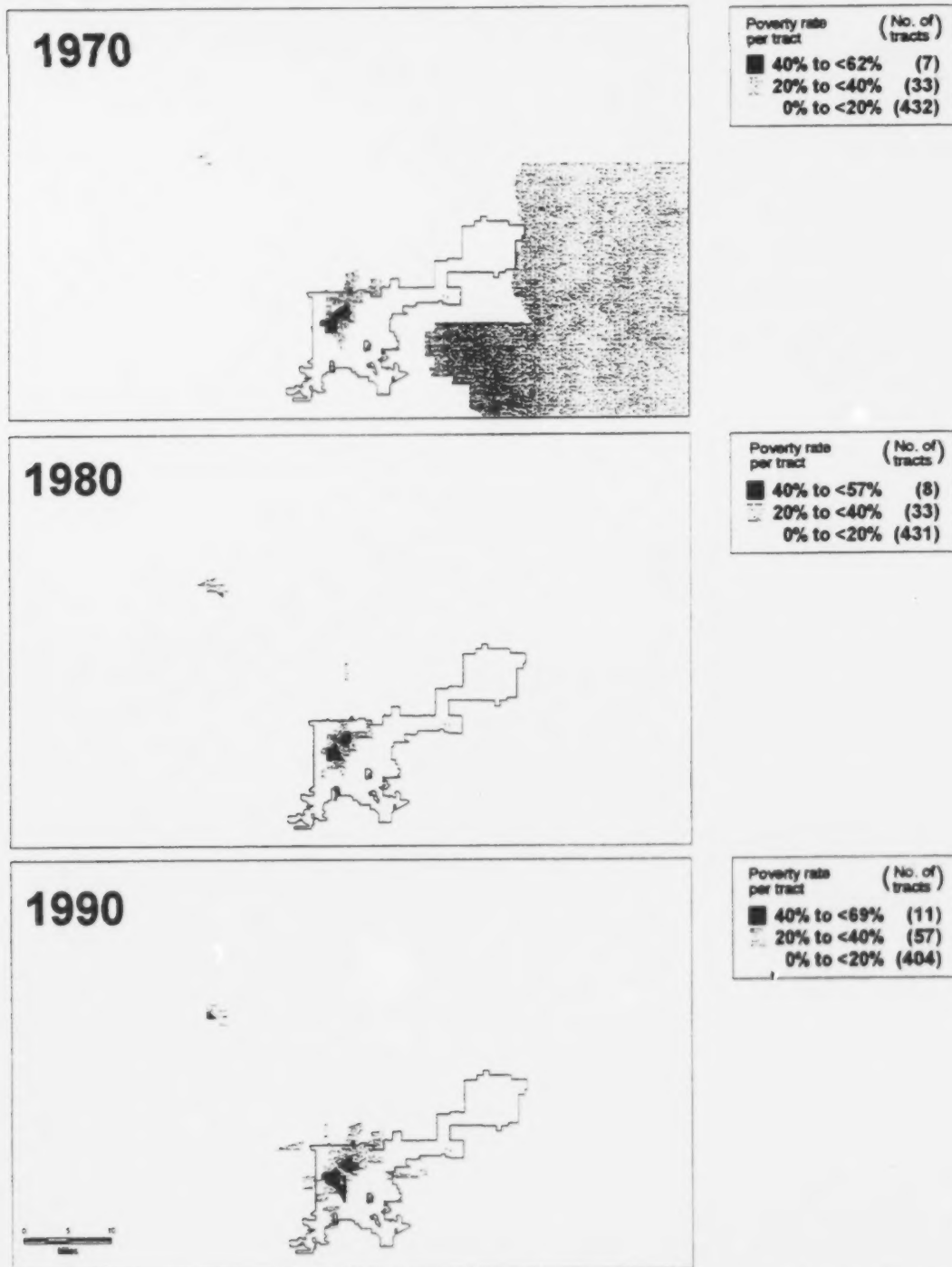
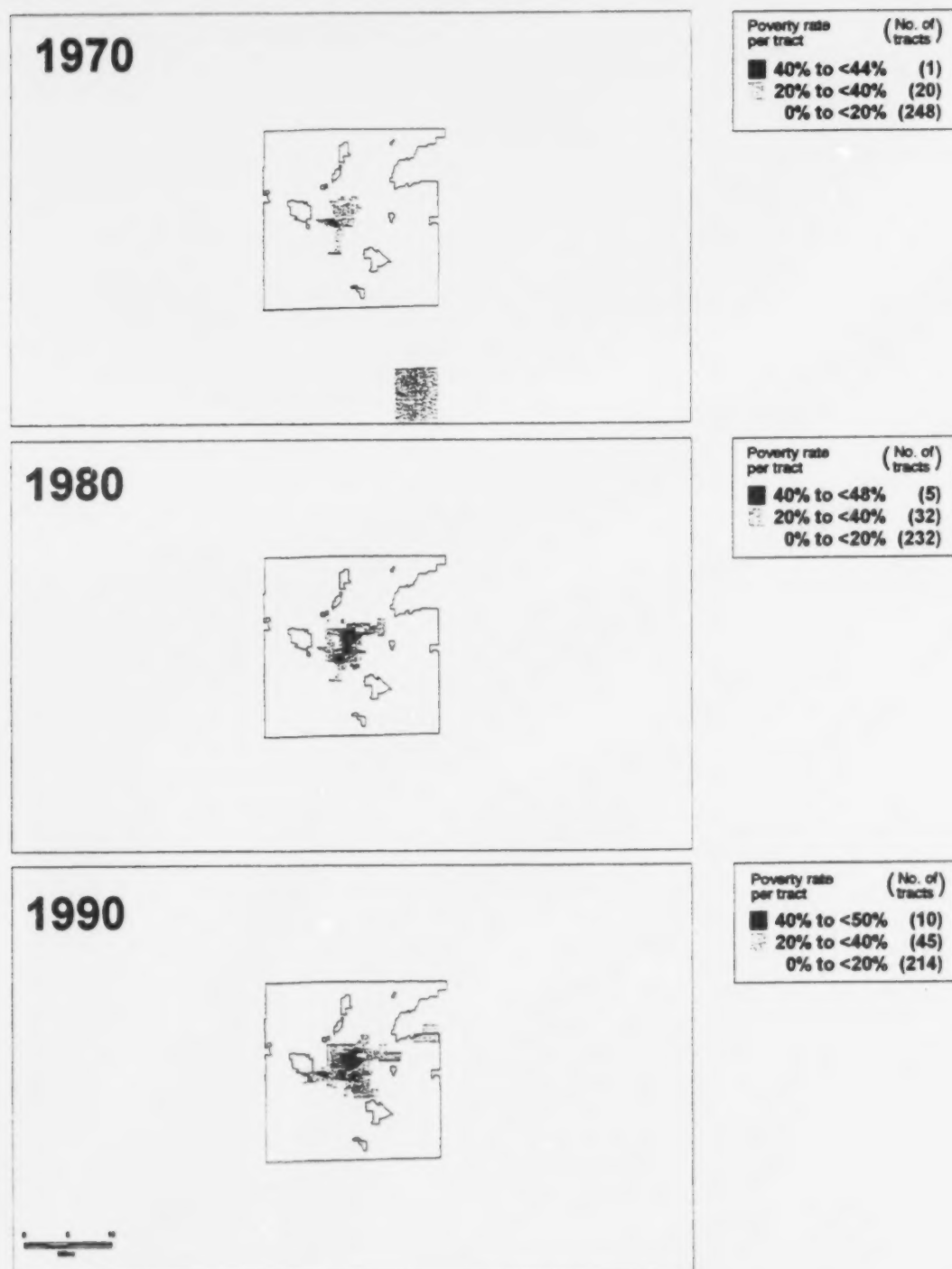


Figure 5. Persons in Poverty, Indianapolis, 1970-90



Kansas City. In 1970 the Kansas City, Missouri, poverty area was confined to the area south of the central business district, spilling west and northwest around the central business district of Kansas City, Kansas (Figure 6). By 1990 the poverty areas had spread into areas of Kansas City, Missouri, northeast across the Missouri River, east beyond the city limits toward Independence, straight south toward the Country Club Plaza area, and into an expanded area west in Kansas. Perhaps a quarter of Kansas City, Missouri's area of 312 square miles was within the poverty zone by 1990.

Milwaukee. Milwaukee's 96 square miles contained a sizable zone of moderate poverty north of the central business district in 1970, plus another patch just south of downtown (Figure 7). Within these zones a handful of scattered tracts had poverty rates between 40 and 66 percent. By 1990 an extensive, continuous zone of poverty—with a major core of intense poverty and tract rates of up to 86 percent—had developed northwest of the central business district along and on either side of Fond du Lac Avenue.

Minneapolis-St. Paul. Minneapolis and St. Paul are small cities within a sprawling metropolitan area of about 5,000 square miles (Figure 8). In 1970 six tracts at three different locations—two in Minneapolis and one in St. Paul—displayed extreme poverty rates, with at least one reaching 60 percent. In 1980 the number of extremely poor tracts had risen to eleven, and by 1990 the count had reached thirty, which was 5 percent of all tracts in the MSA (Table 3).*

Phoenix. Whereas the St. Louis area differs from the Twin Cities because of its population, economic stagnation, and pervasive poverty throughout much of the city by 1990, Phoenix is distinguished in other ways. Arizona's capital city has a vast territory of 420 square miles within a fast-growing metropolitan area, and poverty outside the city as well as within (Figure 9). Poverty areas at the core in 1970 expanded somewhat by 1990, and intensified as well. But by 1990 they still covered only a small fraction of the total city area. Immediately outside the city to the northeast lies the Salt River Indian Reservation with a population of almost 5,000. South of the city is the Gila River Indian Reservation with a population of almost 10,000. Both reservations have a significant percentage of residents in poverty.

* The tract lying at the southern tip of the Minneapolis-St. Paul boundary contains the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and the federal reserve land of Fort Snelling. The area has very few residents and appears as an anomaly on most of the measures studied herein.

Figure 6. Persons in Poverty, Kansas City, 1970-90

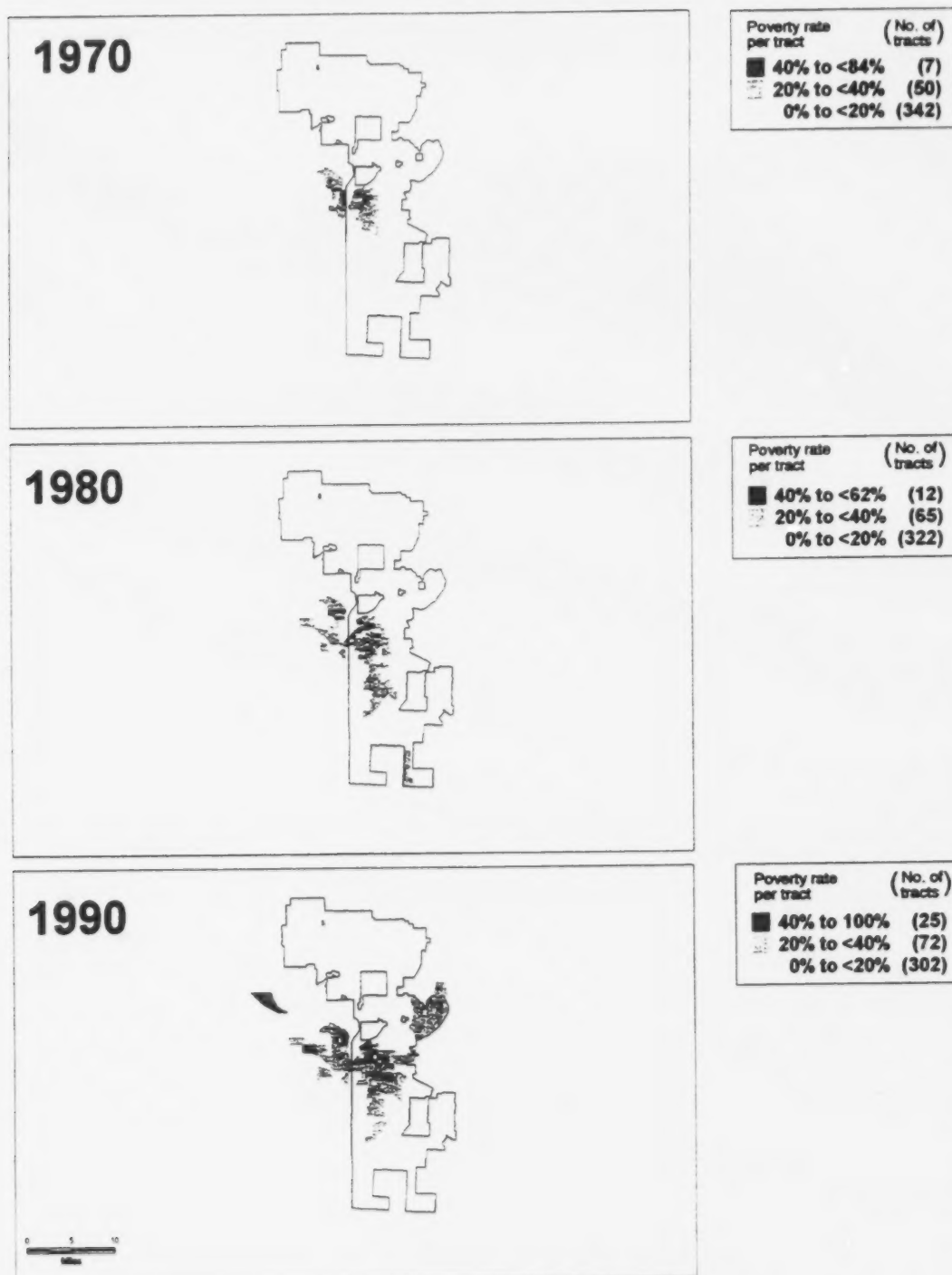
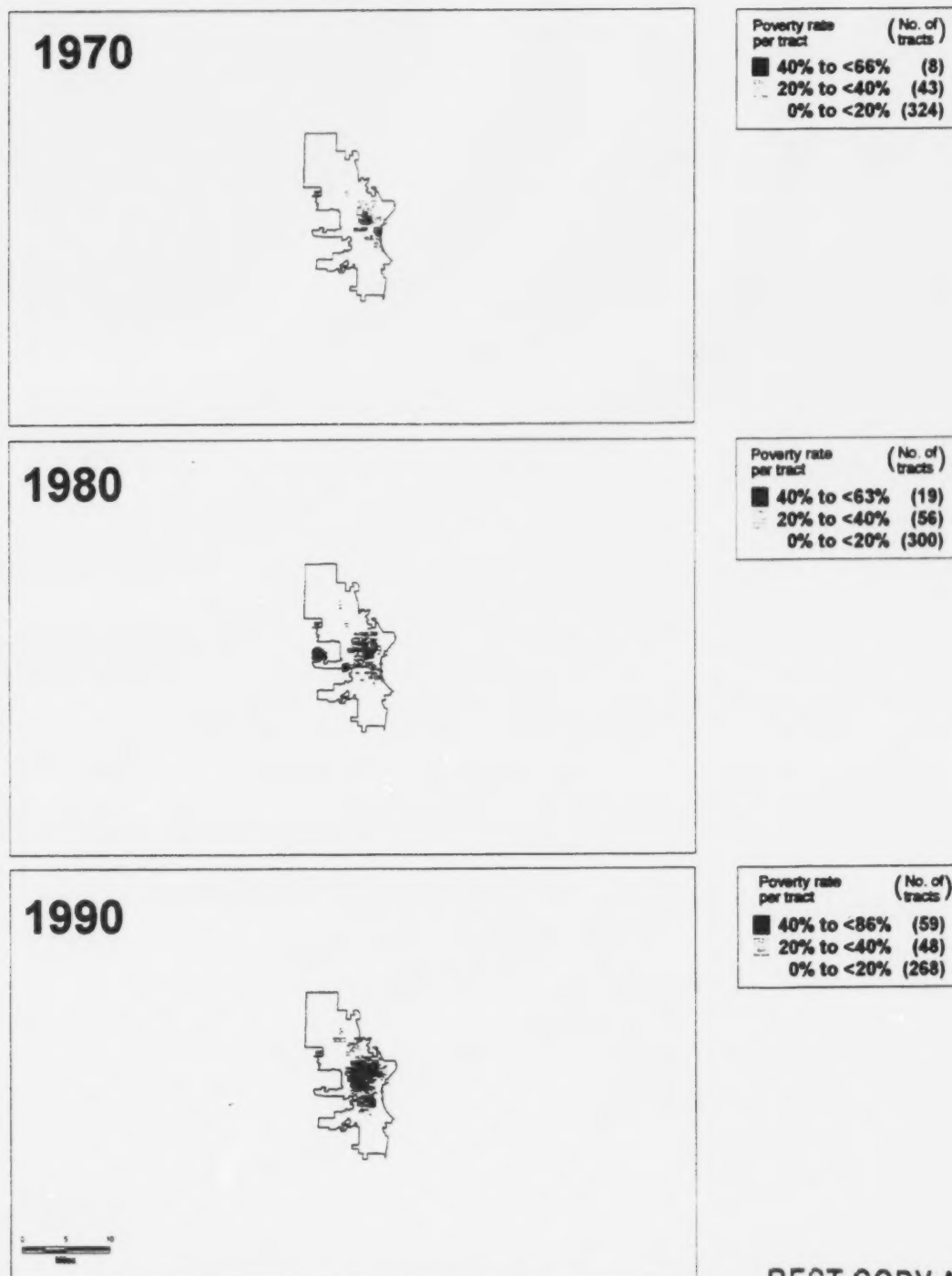


Figure 7. Persons in Poverty, Milwaukee, 1970-90



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Figure 8. Persons in Poverty, Minneapolis—St. Paul, 1970-90

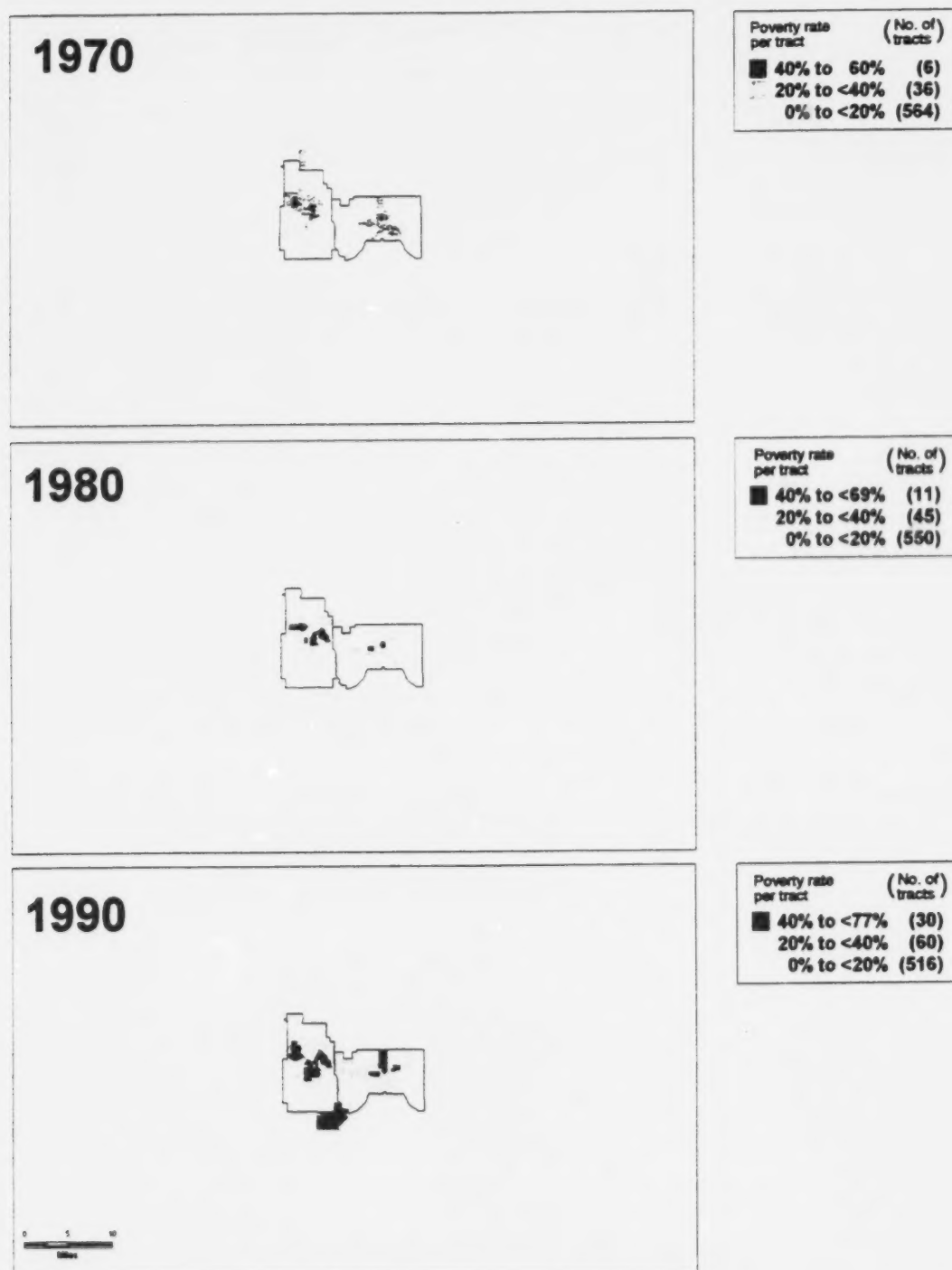
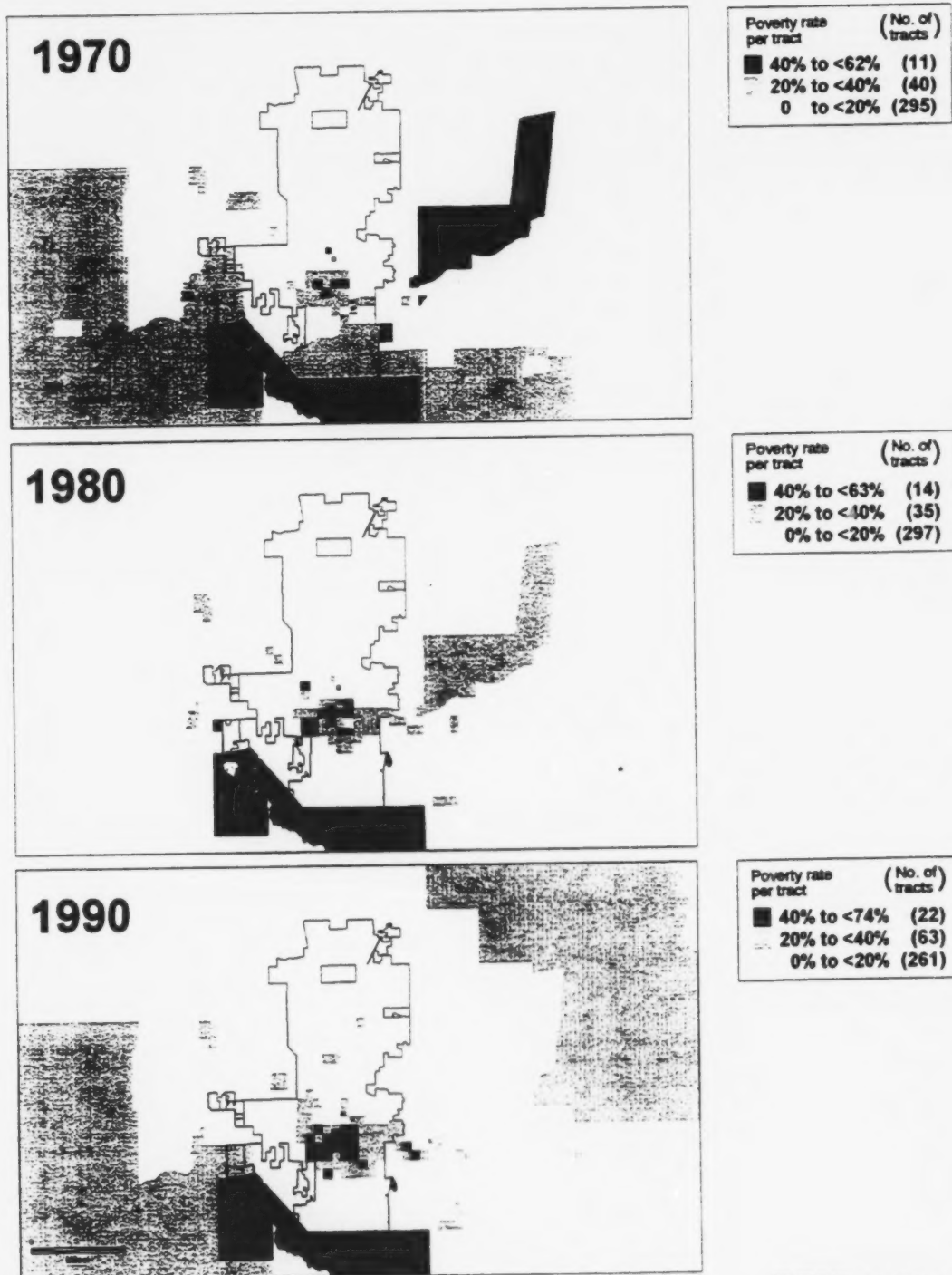


Figure 9. Persons in Poverty, Phoenix, 1970-90



Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh grew up at the confluence of the Allegheny River, which enters from the northeast, and the Monongahela River, which enters from the southeast, to form the Ohio River, which flows west-northwest from the center of town. The rugged, uplifted terrain is cut by the major rivers and their tributary streams. Up through World War II heavy industrial and transportation facilities and adjacent worker housing lined the narrow valley bottoms. Housing quality improved with elevation, with the best housing appearing on ridge tops and in interfluvial areas (such as the area directly east of the central business district) located approximately at the center of the city (Figure 10). The pockets of old and inexpensive housing scattered throughout the city and in nearby river-valley industrial towns today house the lowest income populations. Thus, the poverty tracts in the Pittsburgh area are more scattered than those of any other city examined in this study. The same is true of the tracts with concentrated poverty. The thirty-five such tracts in 1990 are distributed among more than a dozen locations. In Milwaukee, on the other hand, nearly twice as many tracts appear in only two clusters.

Seattle. On the 1970 map only sixteen tracts were classified as poverty tracts, and only three of these—at scattered locations throughout the city's 145 square miles—displayed extreme poverty rates of up to 53 percent (Figure 11). Twenty years later the number of poverty tracts had risen to thirty, while the number of extreme poverty tracts had doubled to six. Poverty in Seattle appears to be relatively scattered in each of the three census years, with little of the extreme clustering observed in other cities.

St. Louis. St. Louis's poverty problem was severe in 1970 and got steadily worse throughout most of its 62 square miles by 1990 (Figure 12). Intense poverty areas with tract rates of up to 63 percent occurred in the neighborhoods northwest and west of downtown, and east of the Mississippi River in East St. Louis, Illinois and adjacent areas in 1970. At that time areas in the extreme north of the city and most of the blue-collar southside tracts were above the poverty line. By 1990 well over half the city's tracts had poverty rates of 20 percent or more. Scattered areas outside the city had joined the poverty class, and extensive portions of the metropolitan area in Illinois had poverty rates exceeding 20 percent, with the worst-off areas reaching 74 percent.

Figure 10. Persons in Poverty, Pittsburgh, 1970-90

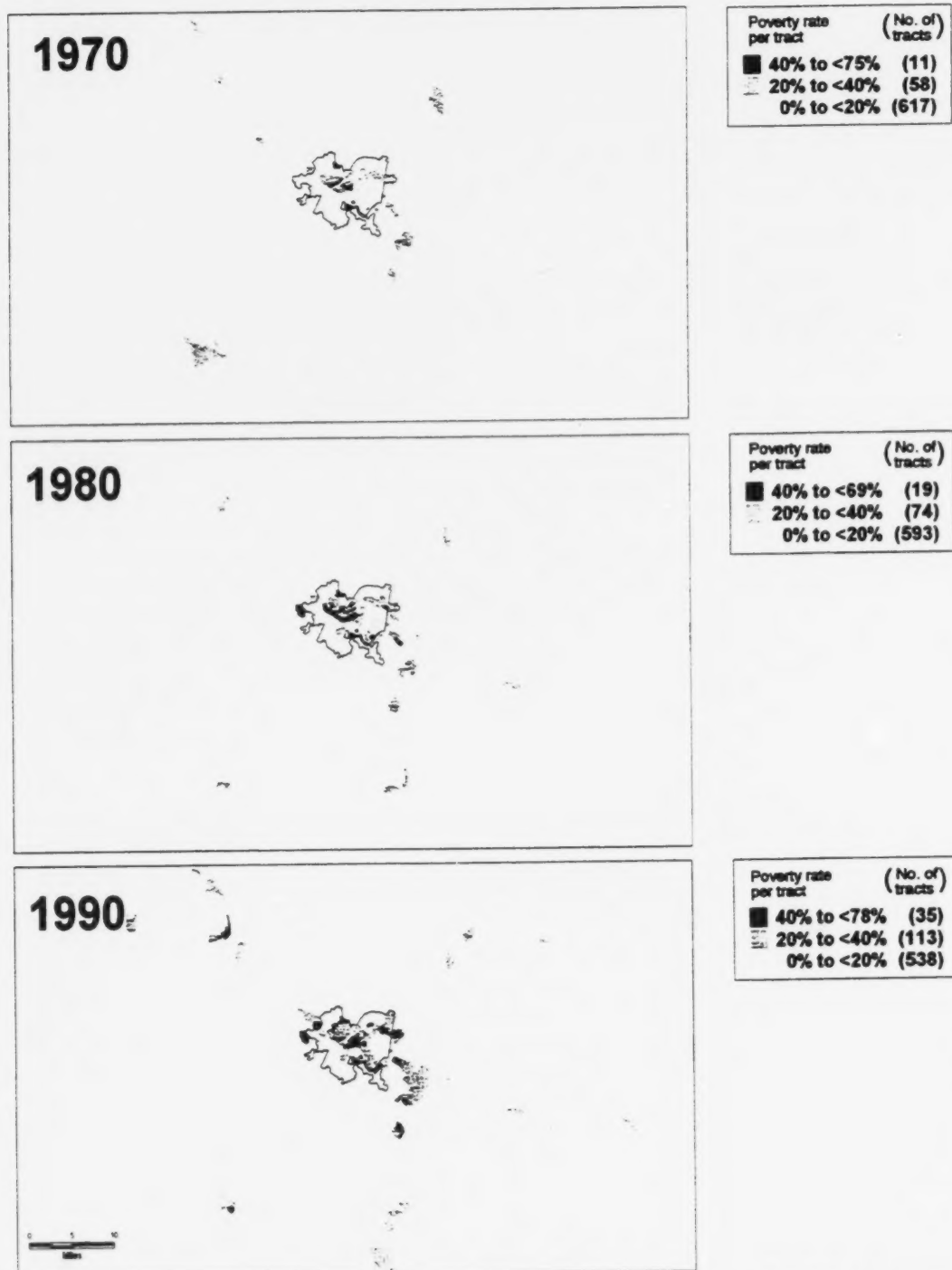


Figure 11. Persons in Poverty, Seattle, 1970-90

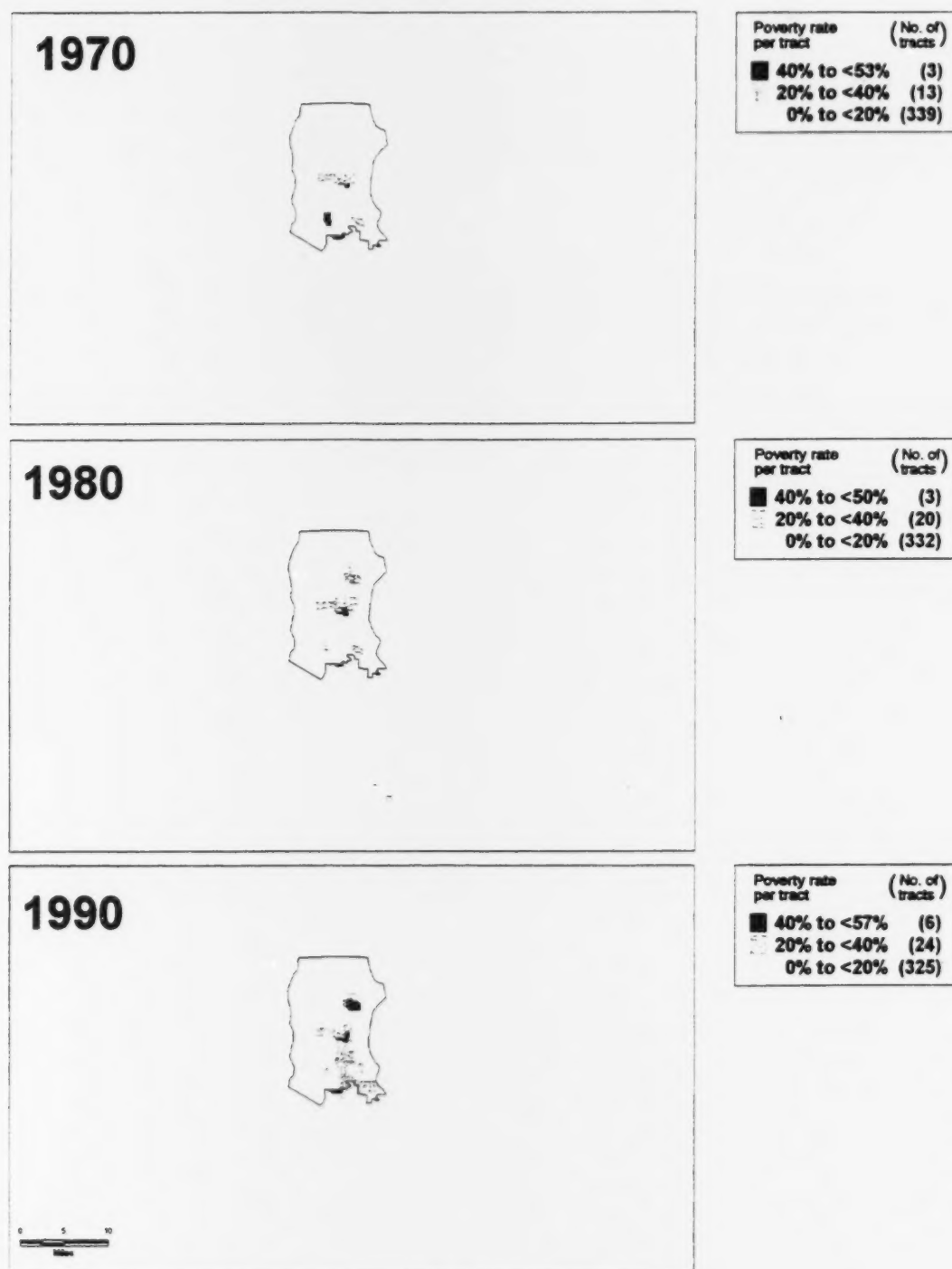


Figure 12. Persons in Poverty, St. Louis, 1970-90



Summary: Poverty Tracts Compared

Among the MSAs, the average proportion of tracts with extreme poverty rates was 7 percent by 1990, with Seattle and Denver, at 2 percent each, occupying the low end, and Milwaukee defining the high end at 16 percent (Table 3). The Twin Cities rate of increase in extreme poverty tracts was neither the fastest nor the slowest growing among the MSAs but fell somewhere in the middle of the group.

The median proportion of tract residents below the poverty level stood under 10 percent in all eleven metropolitan areas in 1970. The spread between the 25th and 75th percentile for tract averages was narrow in the Twin Cities and Seattle compared with Atlanta and Chicago (Figure 1). Each metropolitan area contained significant numbers of tracts with over 20 percent of persons below the poverty line, and the Atlanta, Chicago and St. Louis areas had notable numbers of tracts with over 40 percent of their residents living below the poverty line in 1970.

By 1980 most areas—and by 1990 all areas—had experienced a rise in the median proportion of persons below poverty, plus a widening spread between the low and high poverty tracts (Figures 13, 14). As variation in the intensity of poverty at the tract level increased in the 1980s, simultaneously there was a dramatic and abrupt jump in all metropolitan areas in the number of census tracts with 40 percent or more of residents below the poverty line. The Indianapolis area was the only one of the eleven reporting no tract with a poverty rate exceeding 50 percent in 1990, but Atlanta, Chicago, Milwaukee, and Pittsburgh had dozens or scores of such tracts. The Twin Cities reported nine; only Denver, Indianapolis, and Seattle had fewer.

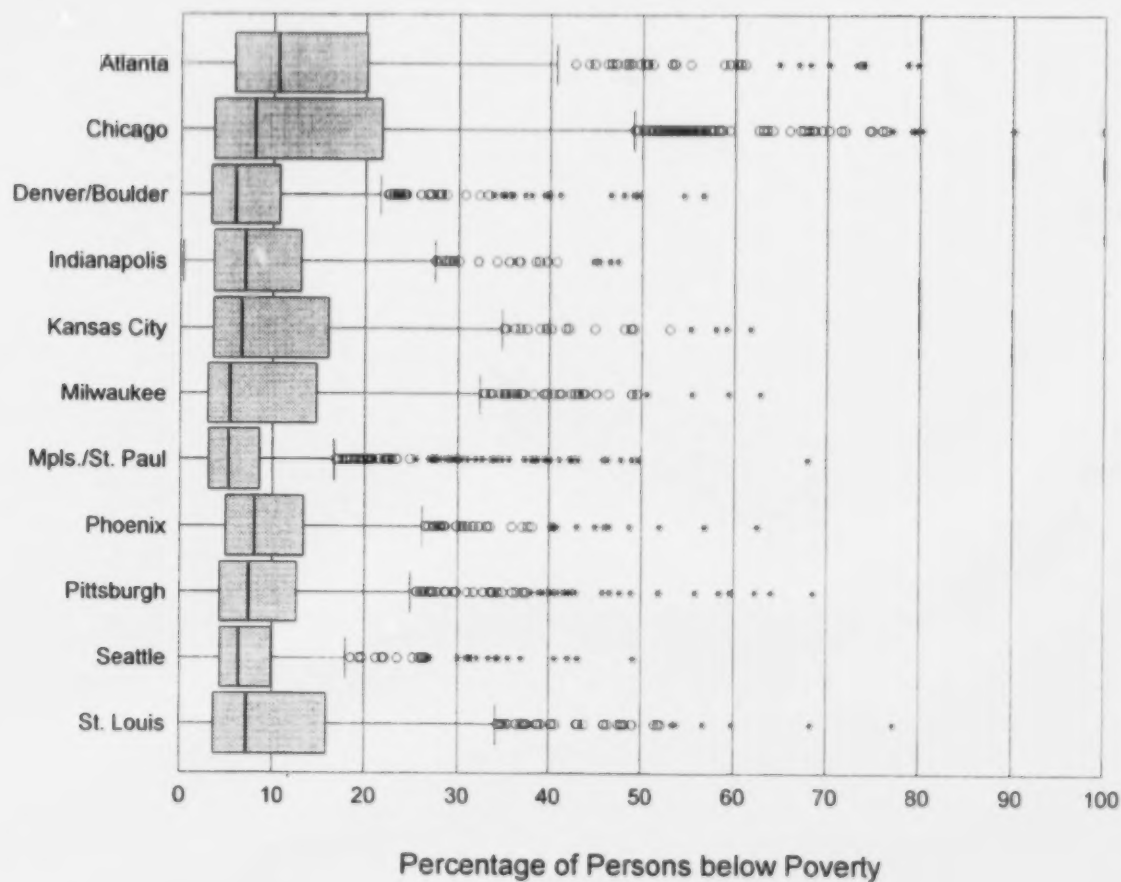
Another way to compare metropolitan areas with respect to poverty incidence is to compare the number of extreme outliers for each metropolitan area in 1990. On this measure, the counts for Atlanta (9), Chicago (14), Denver (5), Kansas City (3), Milwaukee (1), Phoenix (3), Pittsburgh (8), Seattle (12), and St. Louis (1) stand in sharp contrast to the Twin Cities (41). The lower the median poverty proportion and the narrower the spread of the tracts between the 25th and 75th percentiles, the more numerous—and perhaps more prominent to local residents—the extreme outliers appear. Evidently in places where poverty is rare, its concentrated occurrence shows up in census statistics as a dramatic departure from the norm. In contrast, in places where tracts with widespread poverty are common, such as in the Atlanta, Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Louis areas, tracts with high rates are not necessarily classed as extreme outliers. In the Twin Cities area, for instance, tracts with poverty rates exceeding 36 percent are extreme outliers, whereas tracts in the Chicago area would have to have a poverty rate of at least 86 percent to be classed as extreme outliers.

Table 3. Census Tracts with Extreme Poverty Rates of 40 Percent or Greater, Selected Metropolitan Areas, 1970-90

Metropolitan Areas	Total Metro Area Tracts	Number of Tracts, 1970 (percent)	Number of Tracts, 1980 (percent)	Number of Tracts, 1990 (percent)
Atlanta	360	18 (5)	36 (10)	35 (10)
Chicago	1,517	44 (3)	134 (9)	183 (12)
Denver	472	7 (1)	8 (2)	11 (2)
Indianapolis	269	1 (< 1)	5 (2)	10 (4)
Kansas City	399	7 (2)	12 (3)	25 (6)
Milwaukee	375	8 (2)	19 (5)	59 (16)
Mpls.-St. Paul	606	6 (1)	11 (2)	30 (5)
Phoenix	346	11 (3)	14 (4)	22 (6)
Pittsburgh	686	11 (2)	19 (3)	35 (5)
Seattle	355	3 (1)	3 (1)	6 (2)
St. Louis	438	17 (4)	26 (6)	37 (8)

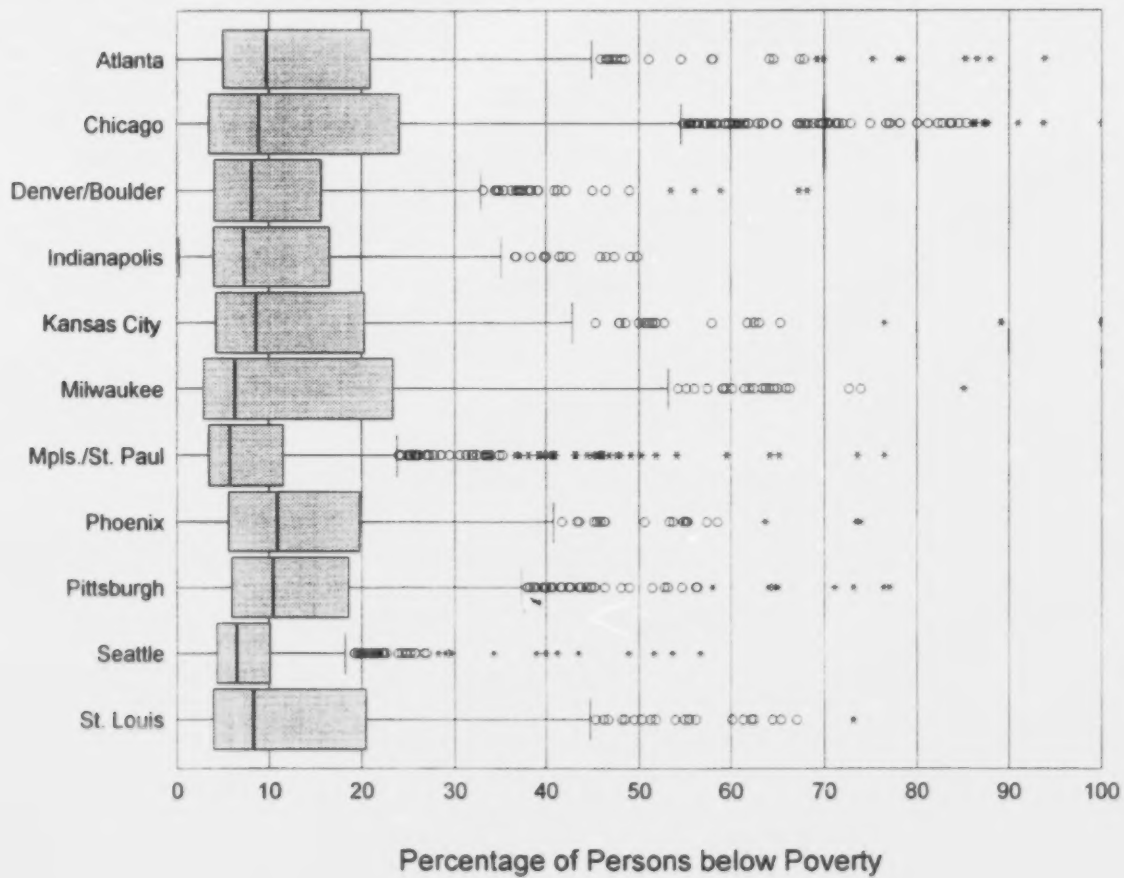
Sources: Urban Institute Under Class Data Base, and (for metropolitan area data) U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1991. *State and Metropolitan Area Data Book, 1991*, Table D. Washington D.C. Government Printing Office. Calculations by the authors.

Figure 13. Poverty Rates in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1980



Note: See pages 28-30 for an explanation of how to read this distribution.

Figure 14. Poverty Rates in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1990



Note: See pages 28-30 for an explanation of how to read this distribution.

Households Receiving Public Assistance in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1970-90

There are seven major classes of federal, state, and local social welfare expenditures in the United States: social insurance, public aid, health and medical programs, veterans programs, education, housing, and other (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, 369). Within the category of public aid are public assistance (Medical Assistance payments and social services); supplemental social insurance (for the aged, blind, and disabled); food stamps; and other (Refugee Assistance, surplus food for the needy, and CETA-sponsored work experience training programs).

State-administered public assistance programs (Aid to Families with Dependent Children [AFDC], Emergency Assistance, and General Assistance [GA]) and the federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program administered by the Social Security Administration provide benefits to persons who qualify. These four cash-income programs are the ones included in the Bureau of the Census definition of public assistance and used in this study. AFDC and Emergency Assistance are, in part, federally funded, whereas the costs of General Assistance are met entirely with state and local funds (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993, 366).

Public Assistance Tracts in Central Cities

Atlanta. The geographical patterns of public assistance dependency between 1970 and 1990 in the Atlanta area match almost exactly the patterns of distribution of poverty during the same period and for obvious reasons—poverty is the main criterion for participation in public assistance programs. In 1970 about one in eight Atlanta area tracts had 10 percent or more of their households receiving public assistance (Figure 15). By 1980 that ratio had risen to one in four, where it stayed throughout the 1980s.

The State of Georgia ranked 42nd in state general expenditures per capita, even lower than Indiana, so it is unlikely that attractive welfare benefits played much of a part in the dependency patterns that emerged in the Atlanta region (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, Table 479). A more likely cause of the stabilization of the welfare dependency rate after 1980 is the area's booming economy, which has been able to absorb large numbers of new workers into jobs at all skill levels. Although extensive areas of Atlanta and nearby suburban areas had tracts meeting the 10 percent or more threshold, areas of intensive public assistance dependency were few and relatively scattered in 1990—patterns quite different from those in Chicago, Milwaukee, or St. Louis—where the core areas of poverty and public assistance dependency are geographically isolated from the rest of the metropolitan economy and society.

Chicago. Among the eleven metropolitan areas, none compares with Chicago in the size, number, or spatial extent of tracts with serious dependence on public assistance. In 1970, 249 tracts (one in six for the entire metropolitan area, and most located in two major districts) had 10 percent or more of their households receiving public assistance (Figure 16). Of that total, fifty-nine tracts had 30 percent or more receiving such assistance.

In 1980 the situation had become much worse. More than a third of all tracts in the area now exceeded the 10 percent threshold, and 194 of them exceeded the 30 percent threshold. Two vast areas of the MSA were covered by the tracts with significant public assistance dependency: the southside, and the area of western Chicago extending to the city limits and, in a few cases, beyond into the suburbs.

By 1990 more than 35 percent of all tracts were beyond the 10 percent threshold, and more than 200 of them were beyond 30 percent dependency on public assistance, with some tracts reaching 100 percent. By 1990 about half the city's tracts were shaded on the map, and large numbers of suburban tracts were above the 10 percent threshold.

Denver. The percentages of Denver area tracts with 10 percent or more of households receiving public assistance stand in sharp contrast to the Chicago area. Only one in eleven tracts met the 10 percent threshold in 1970, with that level rising only slightly in 1980 and reaching just 13 percent by 1990 (Figure 17). The vigorous regional economy helped keep rates low, but extensive areas of the city and nearby suburbs still emerged on the maps showing high incidence of public assistance program participation. The tracts in Boulder northwest of Denver that had a high incidence of public assistance dependency in 1970 had lost that status by 1980, but in the 1970s and 1980s other tracts of moderate to high intensity covered large areas south of downtown to the city limits, and north of the Denver central business district, then beyond the city limits north and northeast along routes to Fort Collins, Greeley, and Sterling.

Indianapolis. In 1970 only eleven of the Indianapolis area's tracts (just one in twenty-four) had 10 percent or more of households depending on public assistance, and the peak tract proportion of dependency was only 18 percent, the lowest peak by far of any of our sample metropolitan areas. Between 1970 and 1990 the number of tracts with 10 percent or more of households receiving public assistance rose from eleven to fifty-five (an increase from 4 percent of the tracts to 20 percent), but there were no tracts of high concentration (30 percent or more) (Figure 18). In 1990 the highest concentration was 25 percent of households in a tract depending on public assistance.

Explanations for Indianapolis's unusual showing are unclear. It is possible that the area is so well situated within the Manufacturing Belt that workers migrate with relative ease to job opportunities elsewhere. The consolidation of central city and suburban school districts into a single, metropolitan-wide public school district may have promoted the decentralization of low-income households and has muted the motivation for upper-income households to relocate out of core areas. Perhaps the area's economy has been doing well enough to take care of its population without doing so well as to attract a significant number of deprived newcomers. Another possible explanation is the State of Indiana's conservative approach to spending. General expenditures per capita for the state ranked 36th among the states in 1991. Meanwhile Wisconsin was 18th, and Minnesota ranked 11th (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, Table 479).

Figure 15. Atlanta Households Receiving Public Assistance, 1970-90

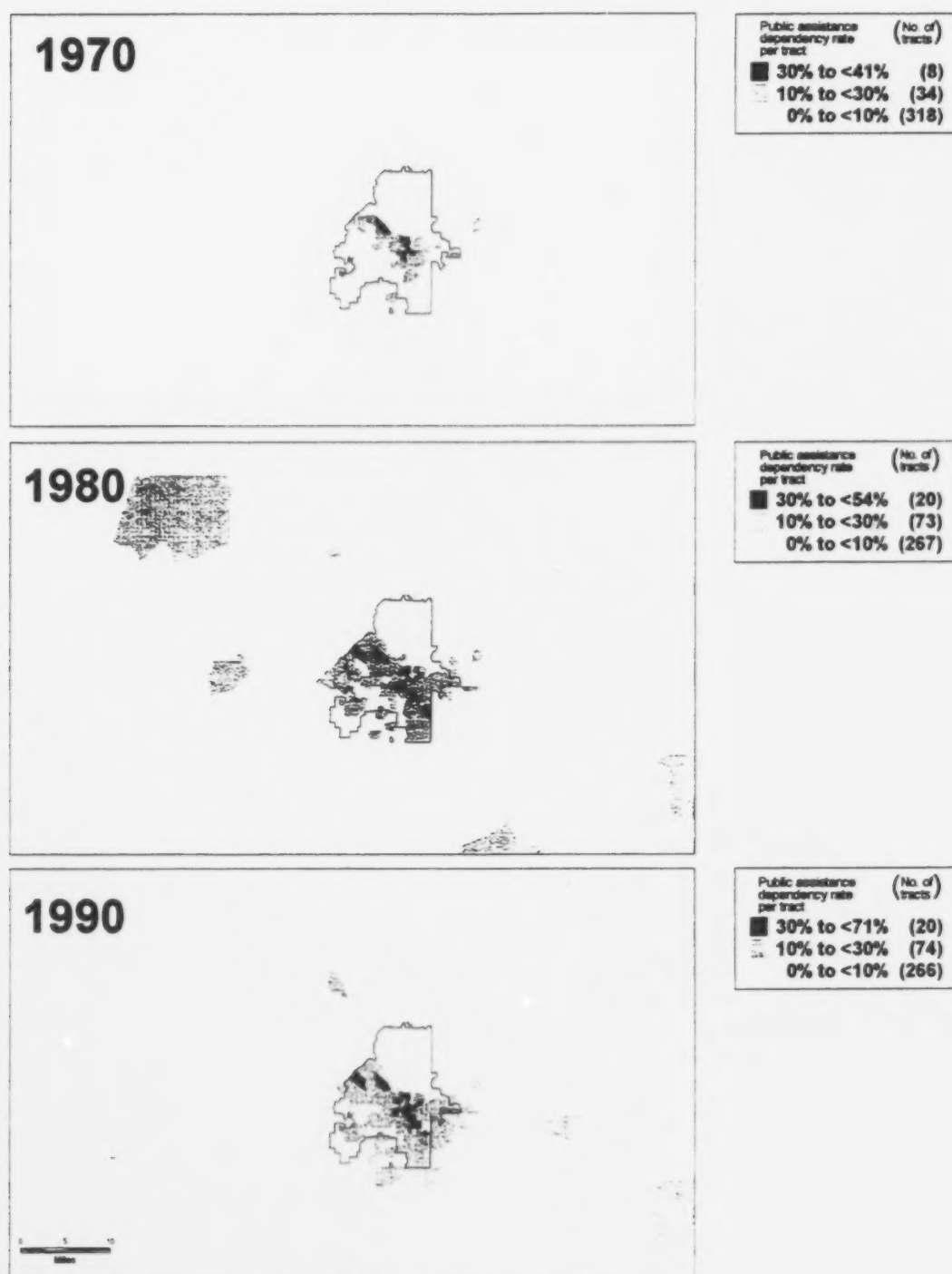


Figure 16. Chicago Households Receiving Public Assistance, 1970-90

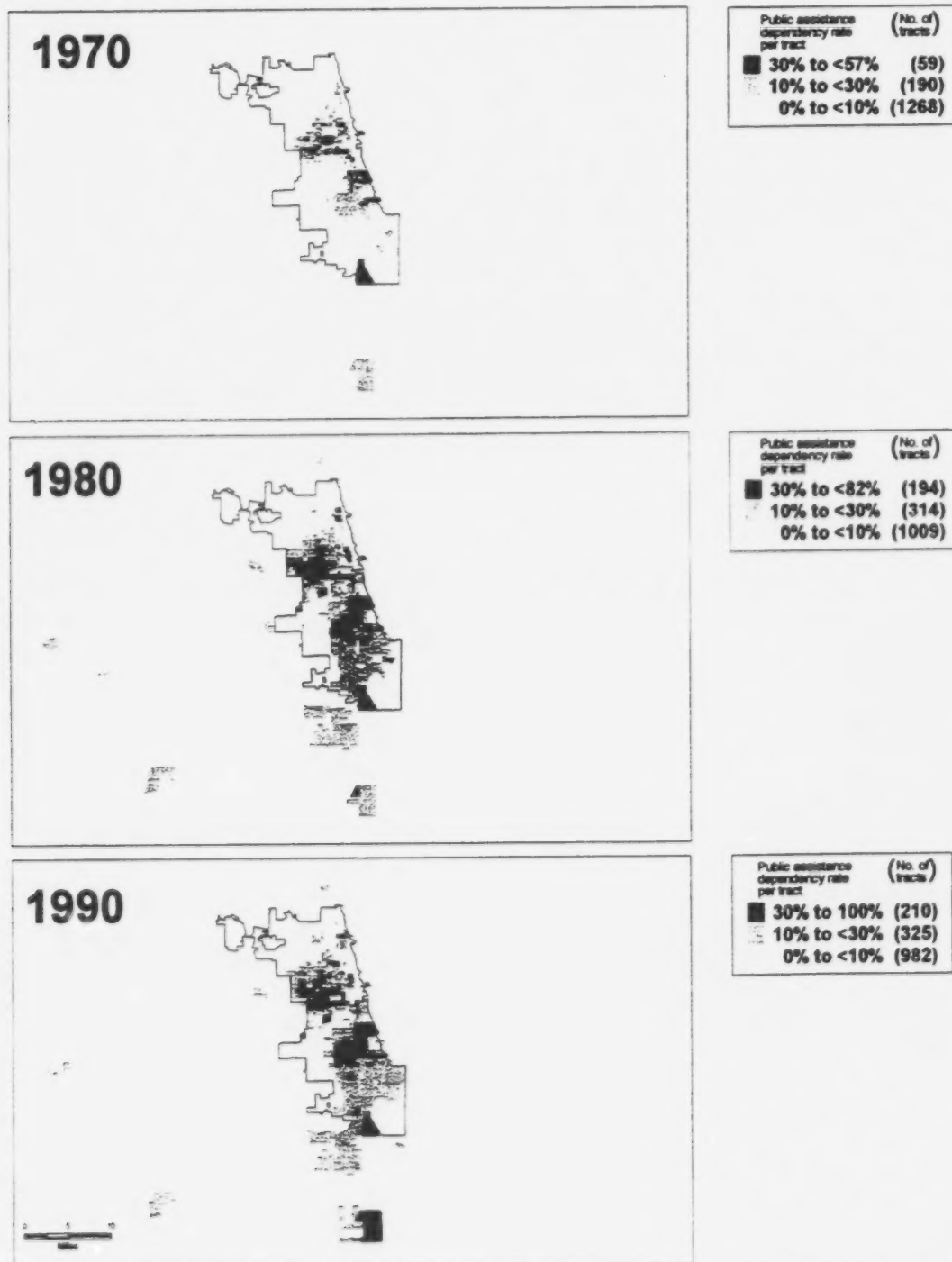


Figure 17. Denver Households Receiving Public Assistance, 1970-90

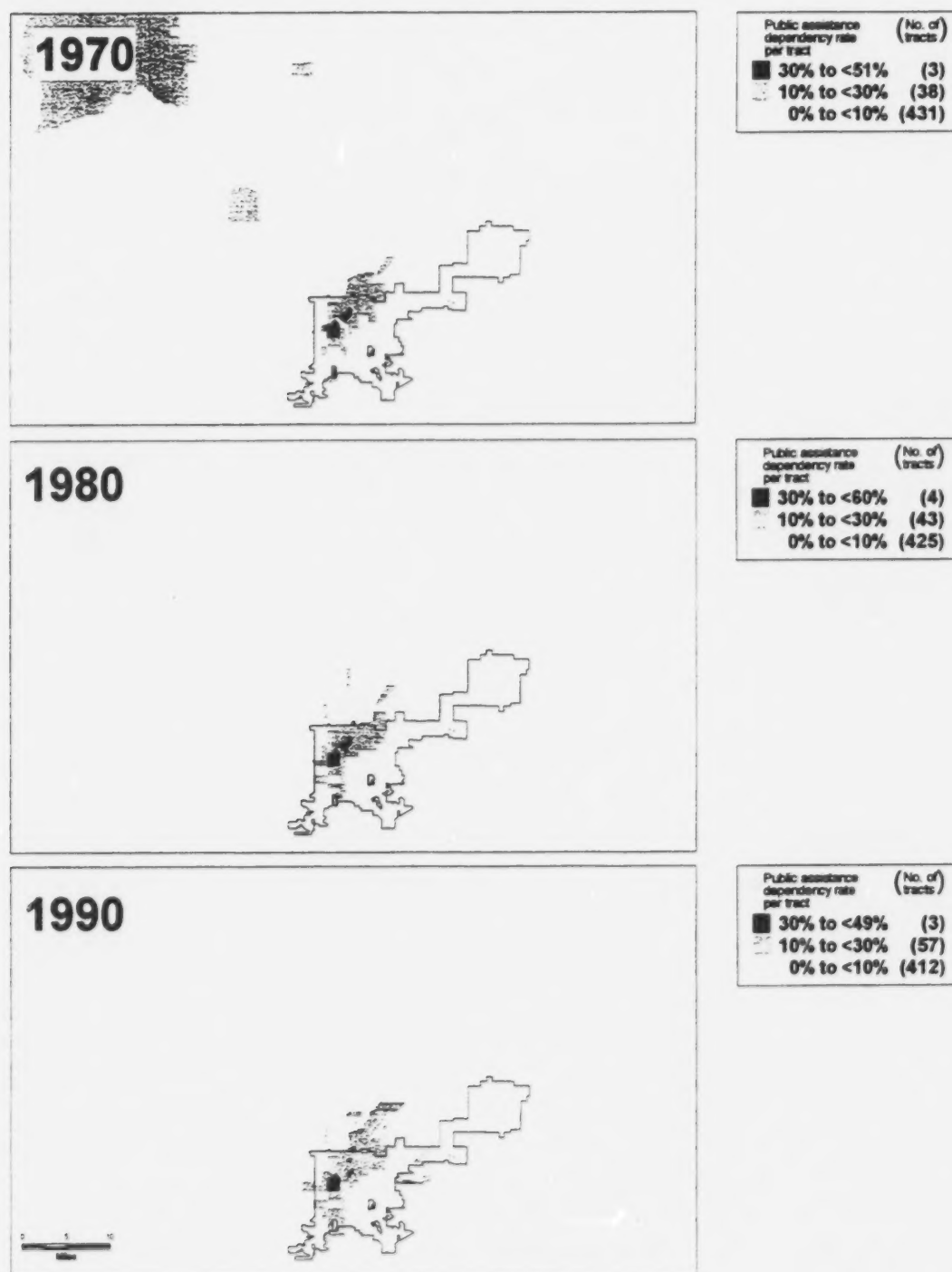
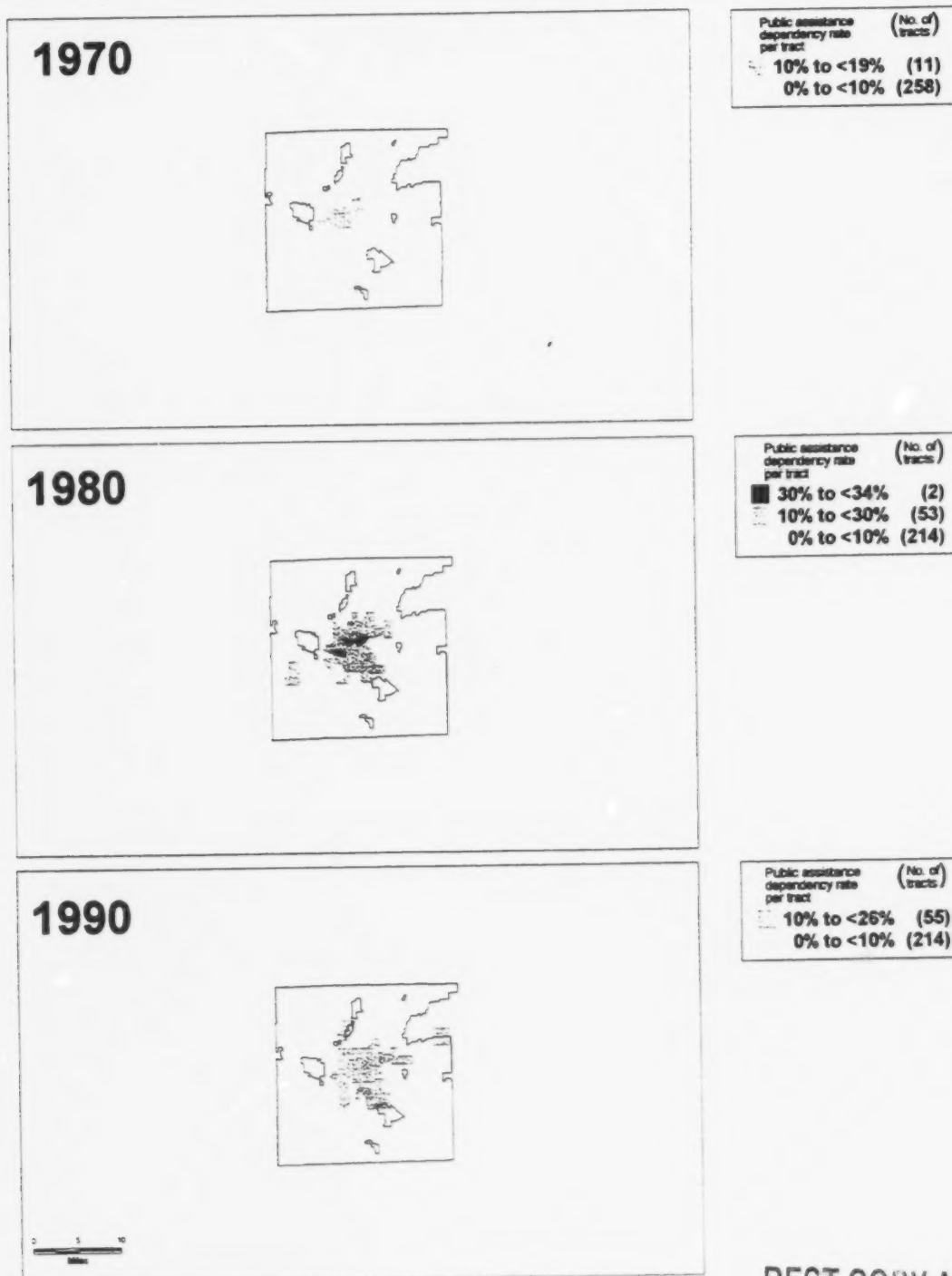


Figure 18. Indianapolis Households Receiving Public Assistance, 1970-90



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Kansas City. The maps of high levels of public assistance dependency in Kansas City closely resemble the poverty maps. The number of tracts with 10 percent or more of the households receiving public assistance rose quickly from 10 percent to 21 percent in the 1970s, but in the 1980s the advance slowed (Figure 19). Nevertheless, by 1990, 24 percent of the area's 399 tracts had rates of 10 percent or more.

The areas of greatest public assistance dependency include the old inner areas of Kansas City, Kansas, around the stockyards and airport; the heavily industrialized Missouri River Valley; and the inner precincts of southside Kansas City, Missouri, which has been the area's most vigorously expanding middle- to upper-middle-class residential sector. The southside area of low income and public assistance dependency is Kansas City's geographic and socio-economic counterpart of the sector northwest of downtown Milwaukee and the area directly south of downtown Minneapolis.

Milwaukee. The Milwaukee area resembles Pittsburgh in the share of tracts with households depending on public assistance—16 percent in 1970, 27 percent in 1980, and 34 percent in 1990 (Figure 20). The difference between them is that Pittsburgh's troubled tracts are relatively widely scattered throughout the central city itself and in dozens of communities throughout the Pittsburgh region. In Milwaukee two main clusters of tracts with high levels of public assistance appeared in the city: one north of downtown and one immediately south along the Menomonee River Valley. The northside cluster, roughly between Fond du Lac Avenue and the Milwaukee River, is the inner portion of Milwaukee's main middle-class residential sector extending northwest from the downtown core. In many respects this portion of Milwaukee resembles south Minneapolis. When Milwaukee's industrial economy was vigorous, up through World War II and for about two decades thereafter, this section of the city attracted workers from the South as well as migrants from other northern industrial cities, including Chicago. Milwaukee's black neighborhood developed northwest of downtown at a time when factory and service jobs were abundant and households departing for new housing farther out released cheap, good quality housing for the newcomers.

Just south of downtown a similar pattern occurred, but with less speed and muted intensity. Southside Milwaukee has traditionally been a stable working-class area, while the northwest sector residents were more middle class and upwardly and outwardly mobile. Thus relatively less housing was released to attract newcomers on the southside. Nevertheless, by 1990 an intense area of public assistance dependence had emerged in old settled southside areas adjacent to wholesale, transportation, and industrial districts where a substantial Latino neighborhood had developed. Meanwhile areas with more than 10 percent of households receiving public assistance covered close to half of the tracts citywide.

The City of Milwaukee's 96-square-mile area is roughly similar to the combined area of Minneapolis (55) and St. Paul (53), inviting comparisons between the two areas. In the Twin Cities, though, there are only twelve tracts of high-intensity dependence on public assistance, and these are scattered among three distinct clusters—north Minneapolis, south Minneapolis,

and St. Paul west of downtown. In Milwaukee, one large area (separated by the Menomonee River Valley) has fifty-five tracts with percentages of households receiving public assistance ranging from 30 to 72 percent. Furthermore, Milwaukee's downtown is located on the edge of its metropolitan area as the area's center of population moves westward and away from the city's business center. In the Twin Cities the center of population has been moving steadily westward as well. Currently it is located just southeast of the Minneapolis central business district and moving closer to it. This movement means that the St. Paul central business district and that city's low-income and public-assistance-dependent households have become more geographically marginalized than those in Minneapolis. The differences between the Milwaukee and Twin Cities situations make references to Milwaukee's social geography as a pattern likely to be repeated in the Twin Cities area seem to us far-fetched.

Minneapolis-St. Paul. In general, maps of public assistance participation rates match closely those of poverty rates, particularly within central cities. In the Minneapolis-St. Paul area in 1970 all tracts outside the central cities recorded rates under 10 percent (Figure 21). Inside the city of Minneapolis, concentrations occurred in three locations: inner south Minneapolis, which lies in the oldest settled portion of what has been the city's most vigorously expanding middle-class residential sector; the Near North area of Minneapolis, which contains the city's major concentration of public housing; and the University of Minnesota neighborhood east of downtown. In St. Paul the concentration in 1970 occurred around downtown with extensions in each direction into the oldest portions of the city's housing inventory.

By 1980 the number of high-incidence tracts had jumped from fifty-nine to eighty-four, while patterns in the cities intensified, and scattered tracts in lower-income suburbs joined those in the central cities. By 1990, although the number of high-incidence tracts had moved up from eighty-four to ninety-seven, that increase was much less rapid than had occurred in the 1970s, and patterns on the 1990 map closely resembled those of 1980.

Phoenix. Like the Atlanta area in recent years, Phoenix has been a boom town with population and economic activity steadily expanding. Domestic migrants, along with legal and illegal immigration and natural change, have all contributed to the expansion of the greater Phoenix metropolitan region. In 1970 only about one in twelve census tracts had 10 percent or more of households receiving public assistance (Figure 22). Ten years later that share had crept up to 11 percent, and by 1990 had reached 16 percent, which was still low by most metropolitan standards around the country. The maps resemble those for poverty, but the extent to which poverty leads to public assistance depends on state policy, and Arizona is another of the Sunbelt states included in this study that ranked low in state expenditures per capita. It ranked 40th among the states in 1991 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, Table 479).

Figure 19. Kansas City Households Receiving Public Assistance, 1970-90

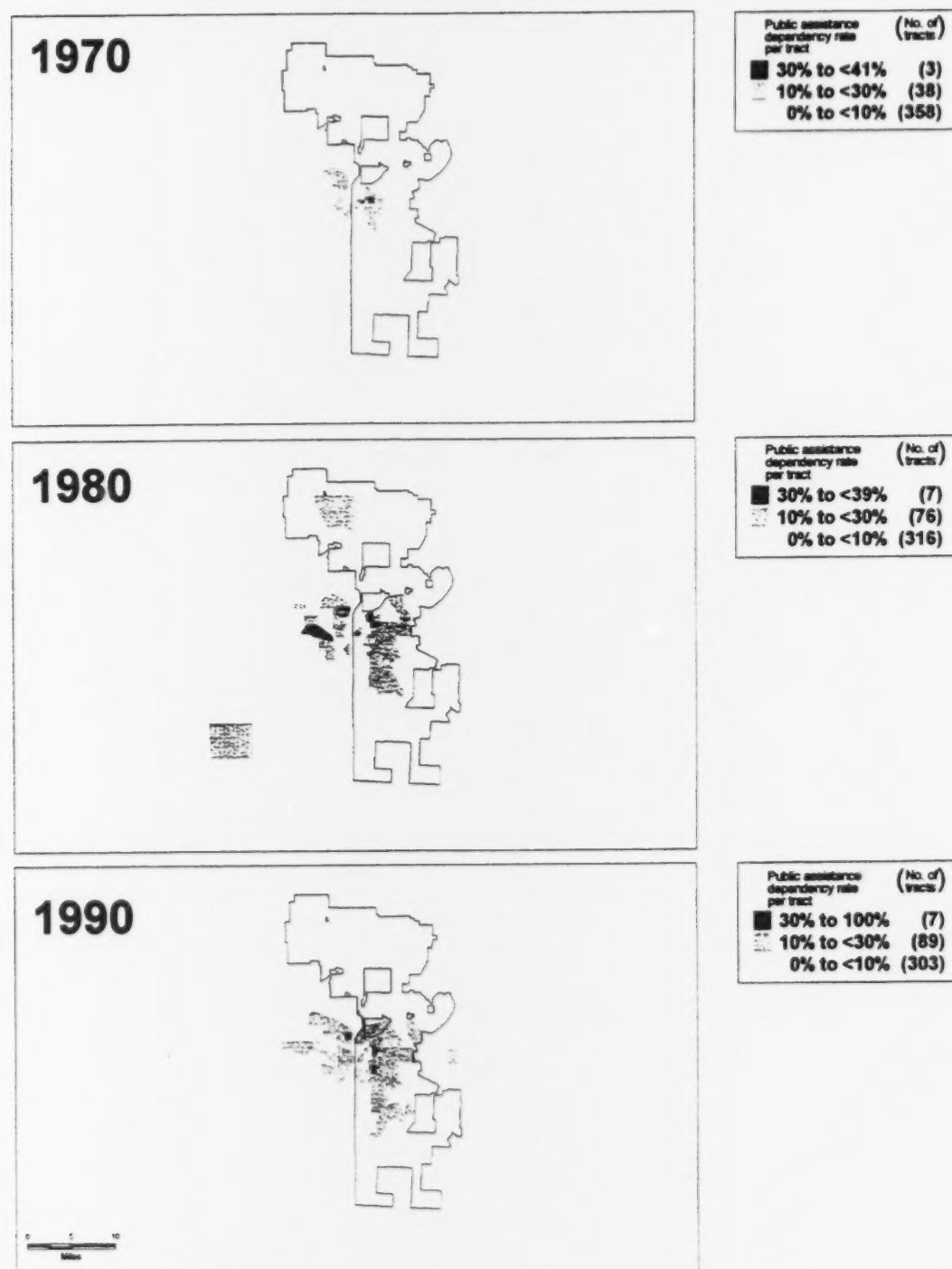


Figure 20. Milwaukee Households Receiving Public Assistance, 1970-90

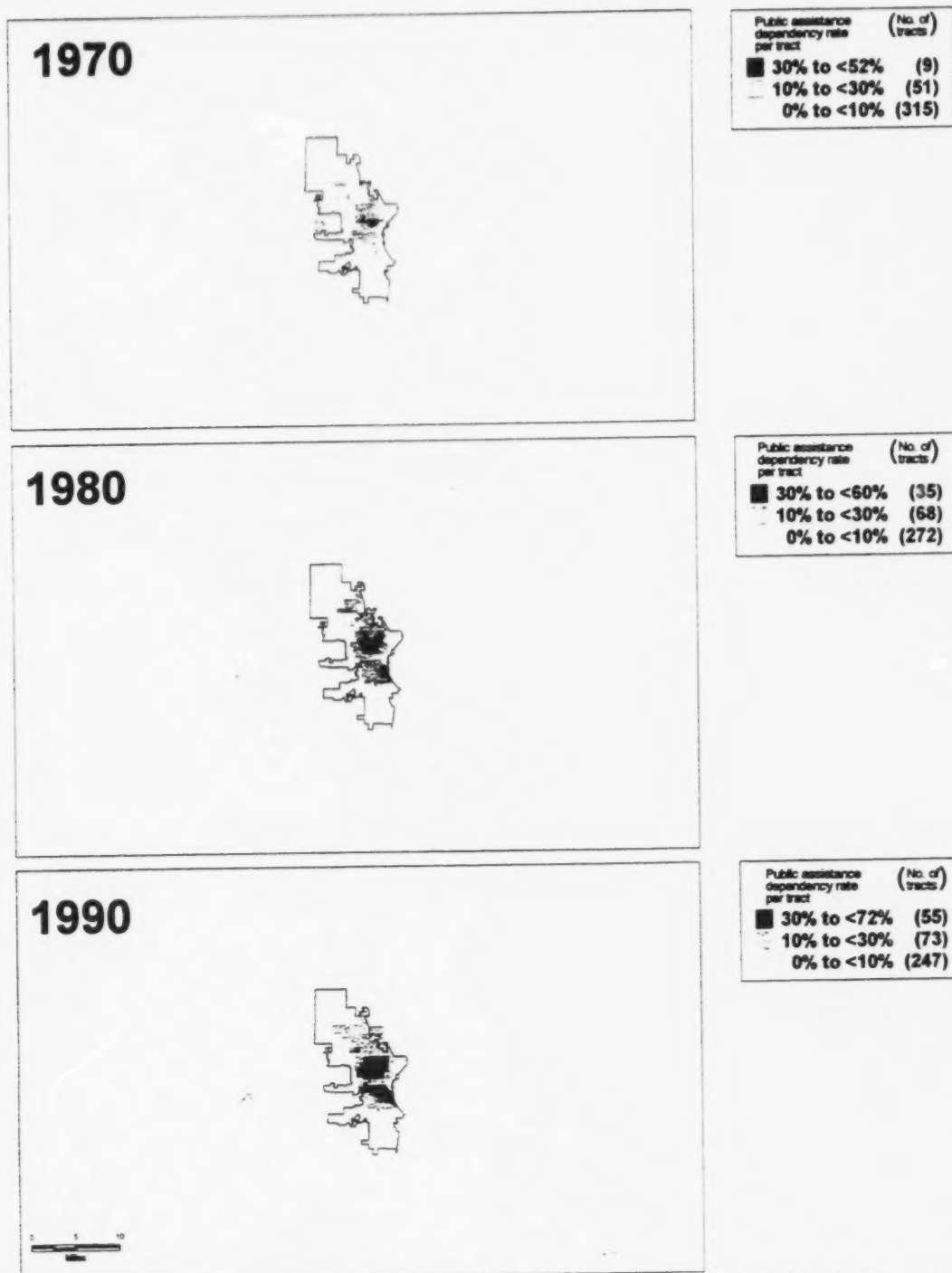


Figure 21. Minneapolis-St. Paul Households Receiving Public Assistance, 1970-90

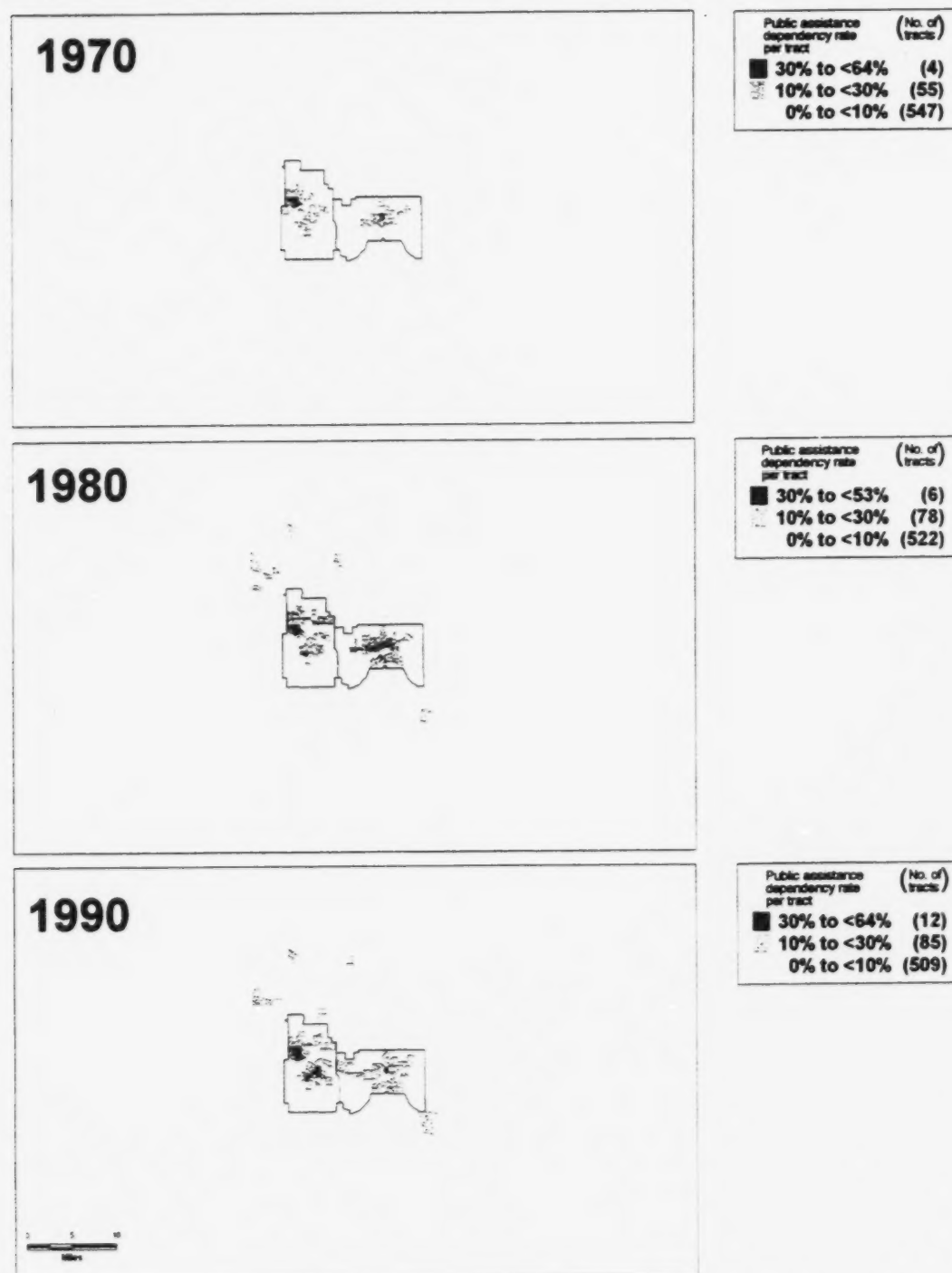
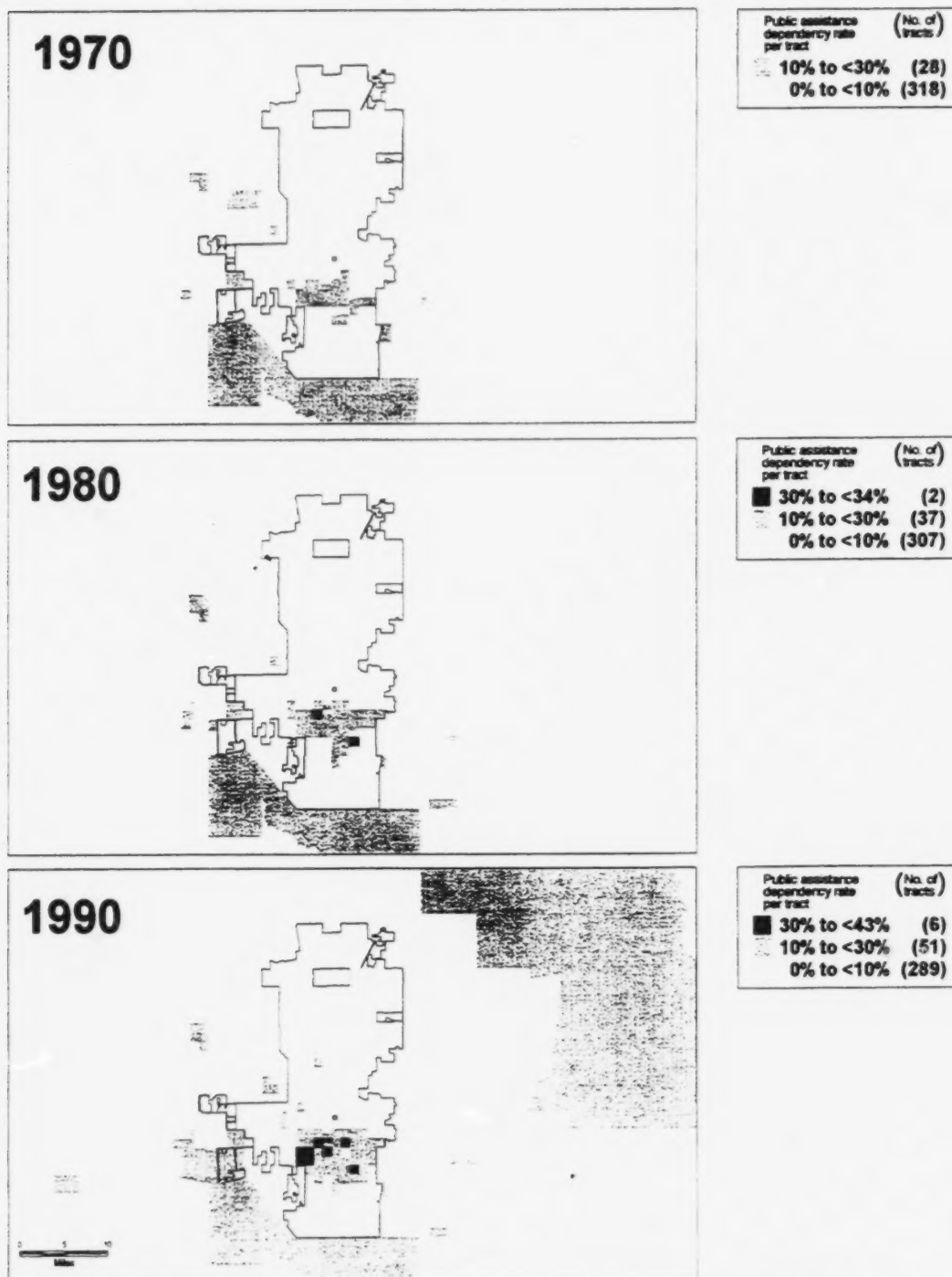


Figure 22. Phoenix Households Receiving Public Assistance, 1970-90



Pittsburgh. The structural downturn in the regional economy in the 1970s and 1980s produced major economic hardship for people in the Pittsburgh region. A hundred tracts in 1970 (15 percent of the total) had a high incidence of public assistance recipients, with concentrations in the older and low-lying parts of the city itself and in the valley mill towns throughout the area (Figure 23). By 1980 the 100 had mushroomed to 207 (30 percent of the total) as hardship continued throughout the region. By 1990 almost a third of the region's tracts had 10 percent or more of households dependent on public assistance of some kind, but the affected tracts were widely scattered at dozens of locations.

Seattle. Tracts with 10 percent or more of households receiving public assistance numbered twenty-eight in 1970, and were located in old settled parts of Seattle north of downtown and east to Lake Washington, which forms the curved eastern boundary of the city (Figure 24). Two suburban tracts lay beyond the city limits to the south; one of these is adjacent to the airport. In the 1970s the number of high-incidence tracts expanded from twenty-eight to thirty-six (up 29 percent), but the number of tracts with very high levels (30 percent or more) remained stable at three. By 1990 the number of high-incidence tracts had risen to forty-seven (up another 31 percent). The same general areas were involved, but a central zone of extensive public assistance support had emerged around the old core of the city. In the 1990 census, for the first time, metropolitan tracts east of Lake Washington fell into the high-incidence category.

St. Louis. In 1970 about one in seven tracts had 10 percent or more of their households receiving public assistance with a major cluster of high levels in East St. Louis, Illinois (Figure 25). By 1980 the patterns had spread out and one in four tracts were at or over the 10 percent threshold. There was a modest increase in the number of public-assistance-dependent tracts by 1990, but there was relatively little change in the spatial patterning during the 1980s.

St. Louis lost population in the 1970s, but then gained at a modest 3 percent during the 1980s. With a shrinking population and a relatively stagnant economy in the 1970s, poverty increased and the proportion of households eligible for public assistance rose. Since the state of Missouri ranked 48th among the states in general expenditures per capita in 1991, welfare assistance was likely to have been modest even if criteria for participation were generous. Regardless of the circumstances, the maps reveal a persistently difficult social welfare situation, with most of the City of St. Louis and large parts of the surrounding areas, especially east across the river in Illinois (which ranked 38th in general expenditures per capita), meeting the 10 percent criterion.

Figure 23. Pittsburgh Households Receiving Public Assistance, 1970-90

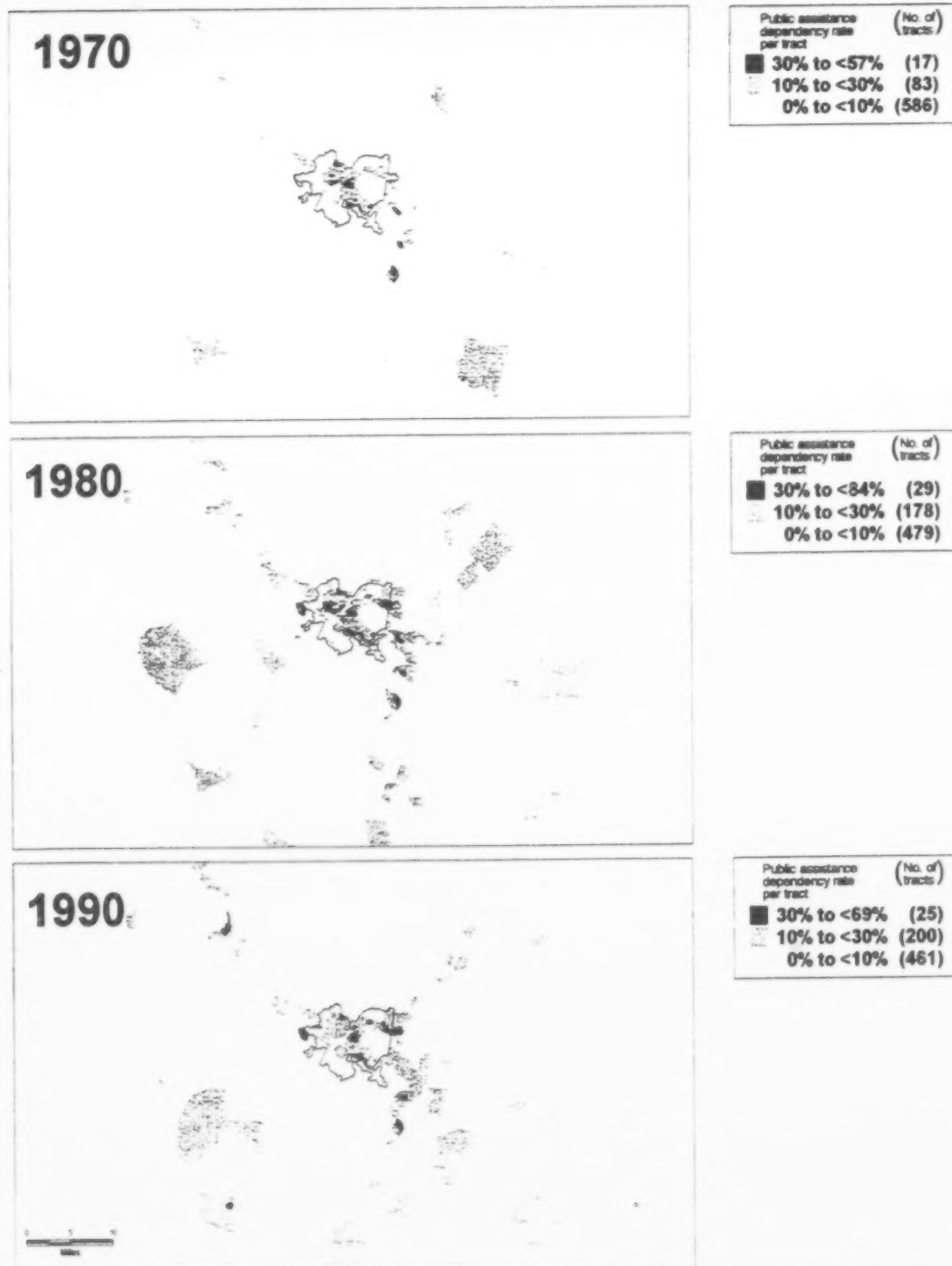


Figure 24. Seattle Households Receiving Public Assistance, 1970-90

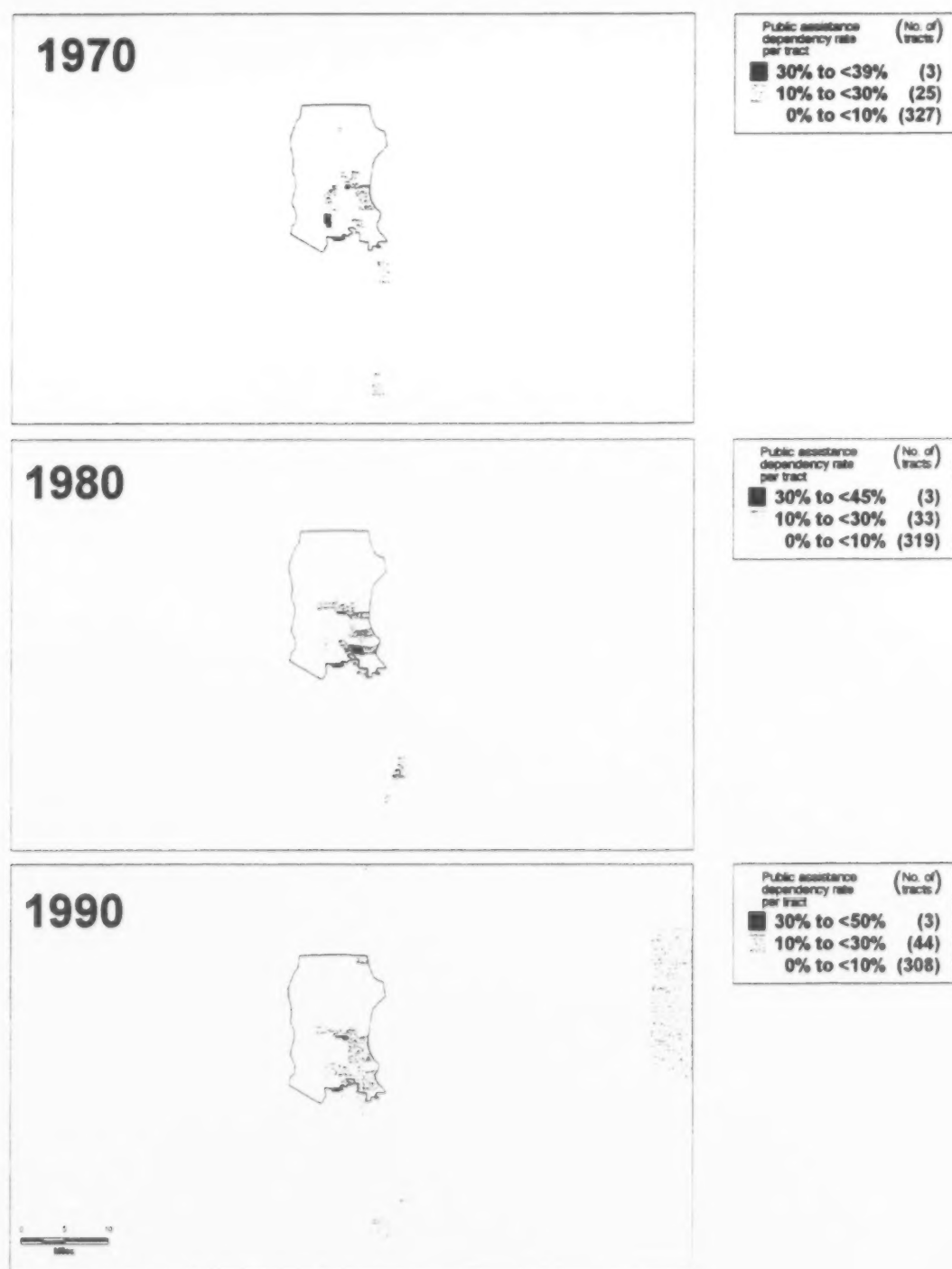
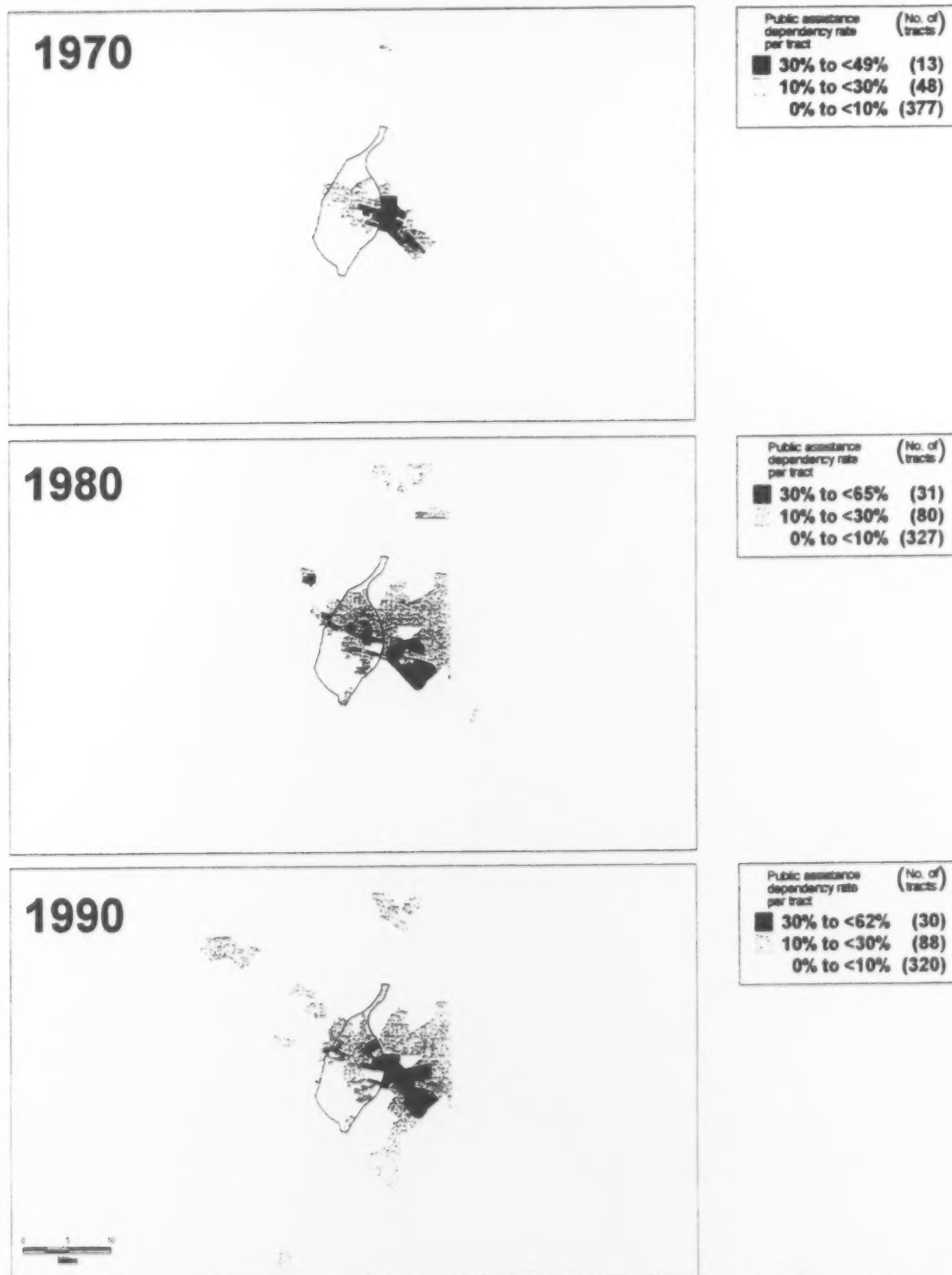


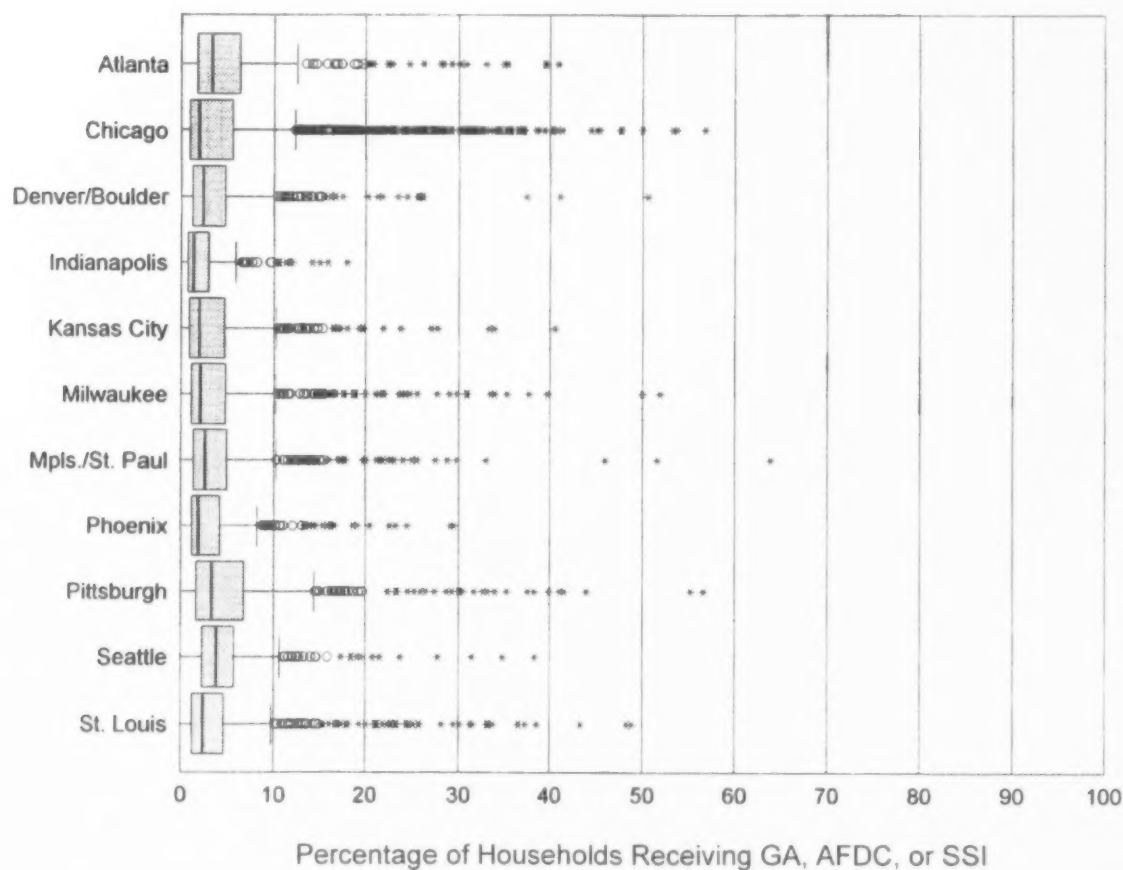
Figure 25. St. Louis Households Receiving Public Assistance, 1970-90



Summary: Public Assistance Tracts Compared

In 1970 the median tract percentage of households receiving General Assistance, AFDC, or Supplemental Social Insurance among the eleven metropolitan areas in our study was 5 percent or less (Figure 26). The spread between the 25th and 75th percentiles was small—never more than 5 percent—meaning that most census tracts in each metropolitan area had only a modest ratio of households receiving public assistance. With the exception of Indianapolis, every metropolitan area contained tracts with the proportion of households receiving public assistance above 20 percent. Such a high level is a likely consequence of one or more circumstances: high general levels of local need, significant geographical concentrations of needy households, and liberal local criteria for participation in public assistance programs—the less restrictive the rules, the greater the share of needy households who can receive assistance.

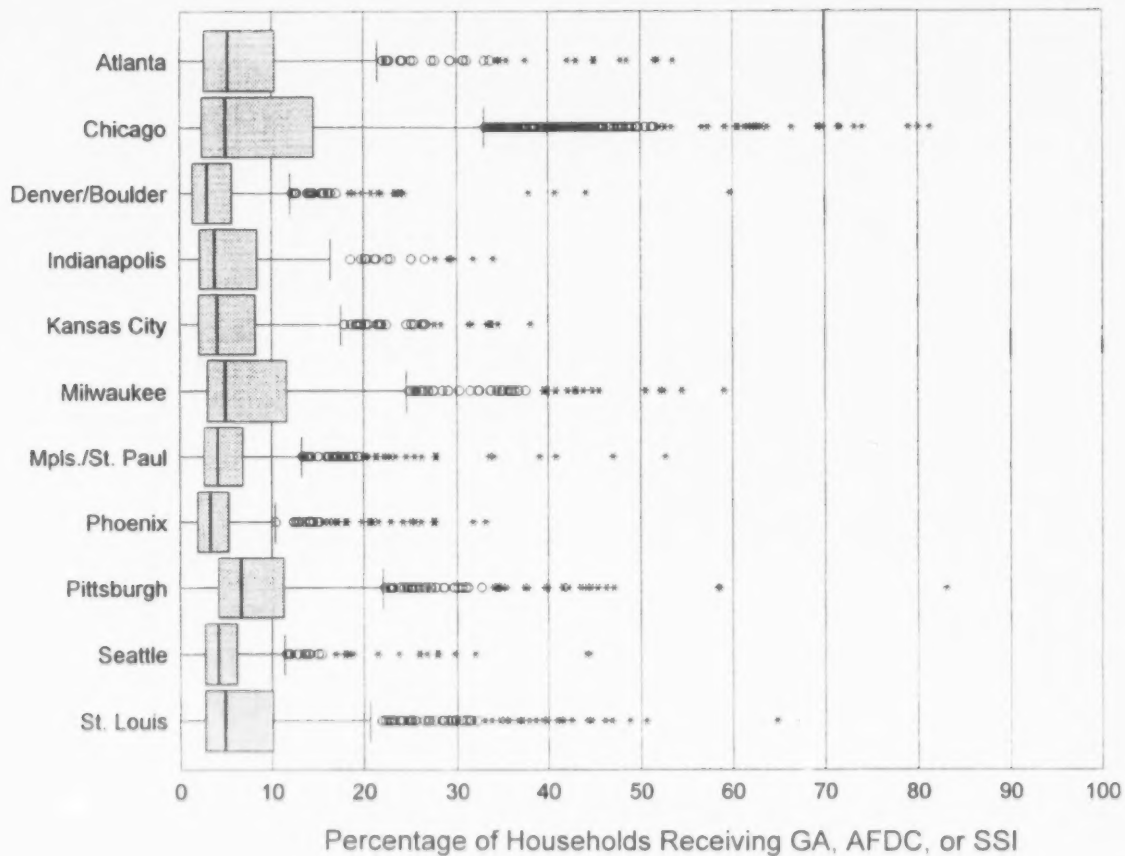
Figure 26. Public Assistance Rates in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1970



Note: See pages 28-30 for an explanation of how to read this distribution.

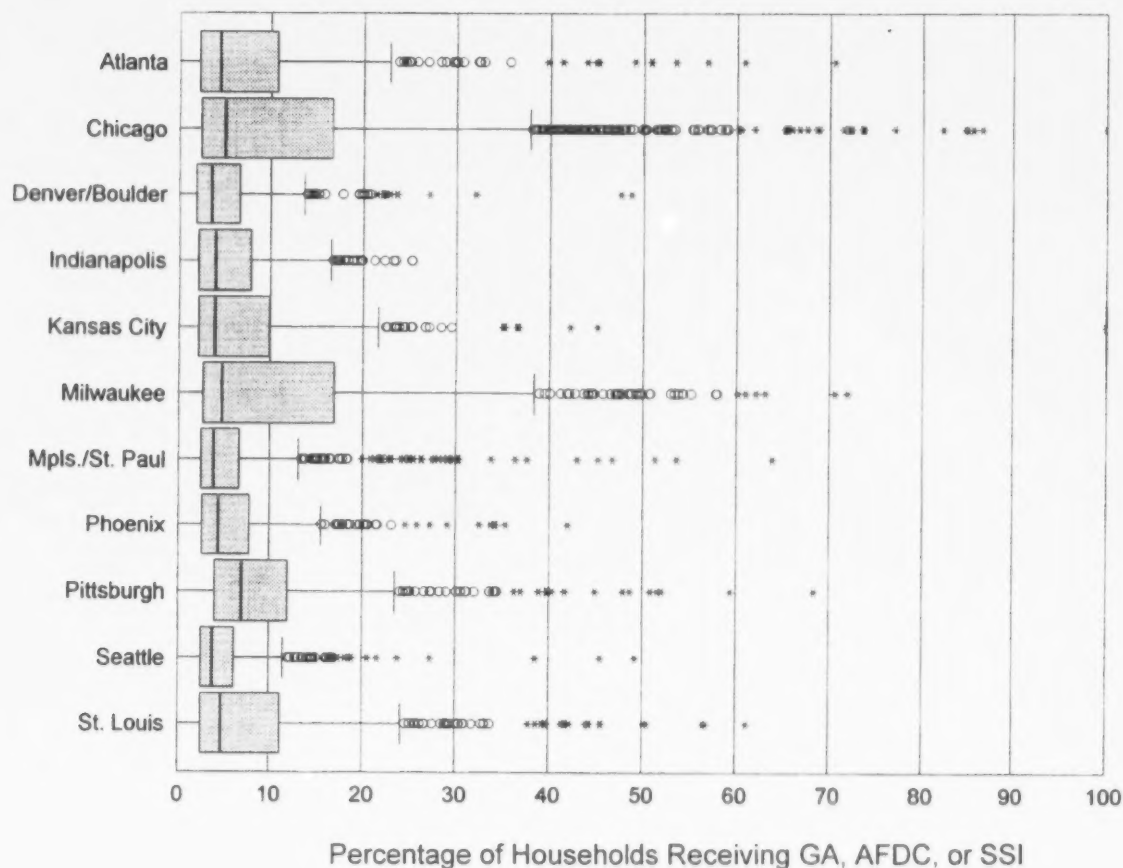
By 1980 the spread between the 25th and 75th percentiles for tract percentages of households receiving public assistance had begun to widen, with the Chicago and Milwaukee areas displaying the biggest widening of the spread (Figure 27). Meanwhile, the number of tracts with percentages exceeding 50 percent had expanded fast in Chicago; elsewhere such tracts were rare, and only one such tract occurred in the Twin Cities area. The 1970-80 trend toward greater tract-to-tract disparities in the proportion of households receiving public assistance continued during the 1980s. By 1990 earlier patterns had intensified and the Twin Cities had three tracts over the 50 percent mark, making it one of six metropolitan areas in the sample with similar concentrations of public assistance recipients (Figure 28). The other areas are Atlanta, Chicago, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis.

Figure 27. Public Assistance Rates in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1980



Note: See pages 28-30 for an explanation of how to read this distribution.

Figure 28. Public Assistance Rates in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1990



Note: See pages 28-30 for an explanation of how to read this distribution.

It is hard to compare the Chicago situation with that of any other of the urban areas examined except to say that within all of the cities except Pittsburgh, the areal concentrations of extreme public assistance dependency are the rule rather than the exception. As the metropolitan area increases in population size and areal extent, large clusters of tracts with residents heavily dependent on public assistance for survival can be seen to isolate the residents from a variety of experiences and opportunities offered by settings elsewhere in the urban area.

How does the Twin Cities area compare with other areas in regard to the number of tracts with 30 percent or more of households receiving public assistance? Compared with the other metropolitan areas examined in this study, it is about average. Five were lower in 1990

(Denver, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Phoenix, and Seattle) and five were higher (Atlanta, Chicago, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis) (Table 4). On the other hand, in the Twin Cities the number of such tracts seemed to be expanding steadily, which was the case in only two other cities: Milwaukee and Phoenix. In Atlanta and St. Louis the numbers more than doubled between 1970 and 1980, but were relatively stable from 1980 to 1990. Chicago had far more tracts with 30 percent or more of households receiving public assistance than any other city studied, but the rapid increase in the number of such tracts between 1970 and 1980 was followed by a decade with only a moderate rate of increase. Phoenix had a rate of increase faster than the Twin Cities in both decades, from 1970-80 and 1980-90.

So while the number of Twin Cities area tracts with high rates of public assistance dependence seems average, the Twin Cities area is strikingly different from other metropolitan areas with average dependency rates in one regard. In other metropolitan areas with average rates the number of such tracts is stable or dropping, but in the Twin Cities area it is increasing. The gross comparisons we have made do not indicate whether this result is due to liberal criteria for determining welfare eligibility in Minnesota, or to the attractive employment situation in the Twin Cities that draws in-migrants faster than they can be absorbed and employed, or to housing opportunities that disproportionately concentrate populations dependent on public assistance, or to social and economic circumstances in other metropolitan areas that keep their totals lower than the Twin Cities, or to other factors or combinations of factors. The fact remains, though, that the Twin Cities has recently experienced an unusually fast rate of growth in the number of tracts with high levels of public assistance dependency.

Table 4. Census Tracts With 30 Percent or More of Households Receiving Public Assistance, Selected Metropolitan Areas, 1970-90

Metropolitan Areas	Number of Tracts, 1970 (percent)	Number of Tracts, 1980 (percent)	Number of Tracts, 1990 (percent)
Atlanta	8 (2)	20 (6)	20 (6)
Chicago	59 (4)	194 (13)	210 (14)
Denver	3 (<i>< 1</i>)	4 (<i>< 1</i>)	3 (<i>< 1</i>)
Indianapolis	0 (0)	2 (<i>< 1</i>)	0 (0)
Kansas City	3 (<i>< 1</i>)	7 (2)	7 (2)
Milwaukee	9 (2)	35 (9)	55 (15)
Mpls.-St. Paul	4 (<i>< 1</i>)	6 (<i>< 1</i>)	12 (2)
Phoenix	0 (0)	2 (<i>< 1</i>)	6 (2)
Pittsburgh	17 (2)	29 (4)	25 (4)
Seattle	3 (<i>< 1</i>)	3 (<i>< 1</i>)	3 (<i>< 1</i>)
St. Louis	13 (3)	31 (7)	30 (7)

Source: Urban Institute Under Class Data Base. Calculations by the authors.

Female-headed Families and Subfamilies in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1970–90

In 1970 one in nine family households (defined as two or more members related by blood or marriage) was headed by a female. During the 1970s that number increased by 56 percent from 5.5 million to 8.7 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, Table 65). Then, in the 1980s it rose by another 25 percent to 10.9 million or one in six families. It continues to rise in the 1990s, both in absolute numbers and as a share of all households.

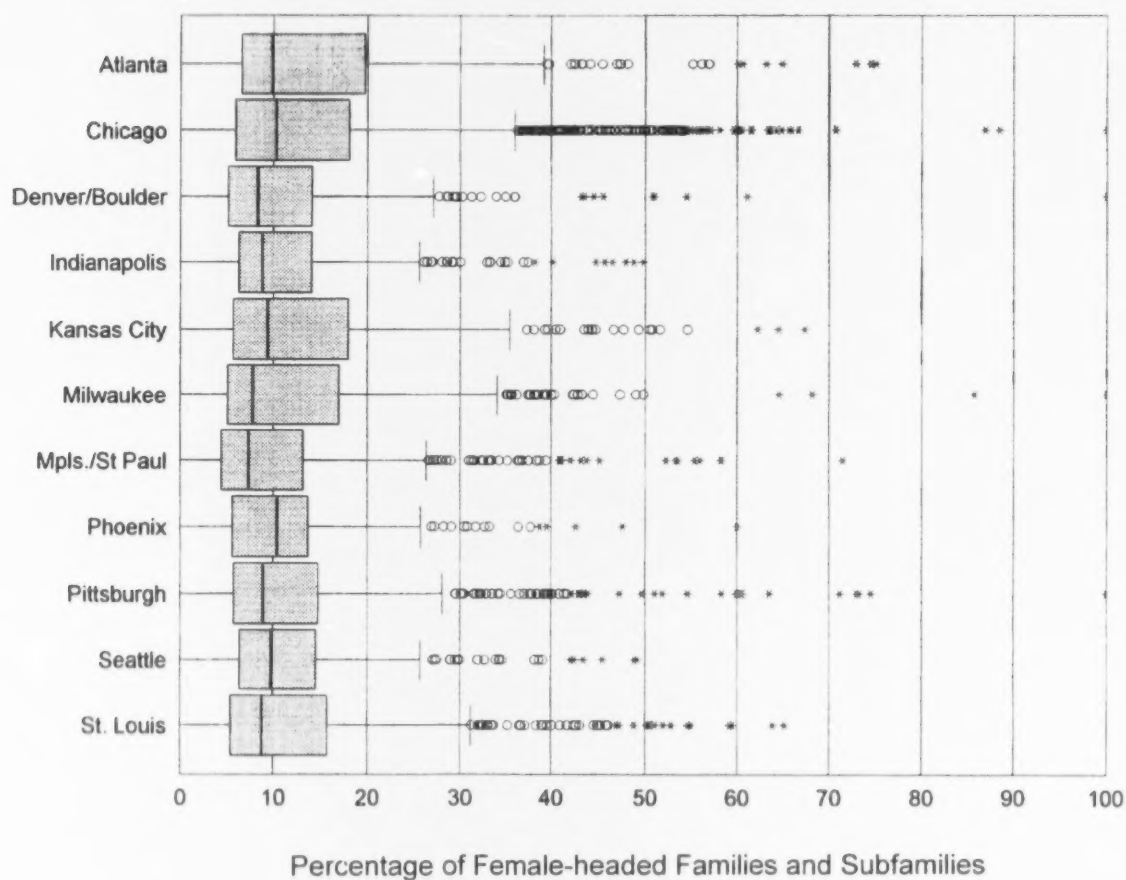
The median percentage of female-headed families and subfamilies varied little from city to city in 1970, with values hovering around or just below the national average of 11 percent (Figure 29). The Minneapolis–St. Paul average was the lowest among the eleven metropolitan areas at around 7 percent, and Phoenix was highest at about 11 percent. Despite the low averages, all areas contained tracts with ratios exceeding 40 percent, and in Atlanta, Chicago, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis such tracts were numerous (Table 5). Six metropolitan areas had one or more tracts exceeding 70 percent, but such extremes were rare, even in Chicago.

By 1980 the picture had changed dramatically in all our sample metropolitan areas (Figure 30). The national average of female-headed families and subfamilies had reached almost 15 percent, while in the eleven areas the median of the tract averages ranged from a high of almost 19 percent in Atlanta to a low of about 13 percent in Minneapolis–St. Paul. Meanwhile tracts became much more diverse in their ratios of female-headed families, as disclosed by the spread between the 25th and 75th percentile of tract values. The spread expanded to about twenty-five (the largest) in the Chicago area and to thirteen (the lowest) in the Twin Cities and Seattle. Every area had one or more tracts with averages exceeding 60 percent, and five areas had tracts with 100 percent.

These trends continued through the next decade. By 1990 the national average of female-headed families and subfamilies had reached 16.5 percent. Median tract values in the eleven areas under study had risen to between 20 and 30 percent in all but three areas: the Twin Cities, Pittsburgh, and Seattle (Figure 31). The spreads between the 25th and 75th percentiles were greatest in Atlanta, Chicago and Milwaukee; and smallest in Phoenix (15), Seattle (13), and the Twin Cities (18). Tracts with ratios of female-headed families and subfamilies exceeding 70 percent were common in all areas except Phoenix and Seattle.

The metropolitan area maps that illustrate the distribution and concentrations of female-headed families and subfamilies resemble closely the poverty maps already discussed, with high-concentration areas spreading outward rapidly over time (Figures 32–42). Concentrations of poverty and of female-headed families and subfamilies are in roughly the same geographic areas, but the female-headed family pattern is more widespread, covering broader areas than those highlighted on the poverty maps.

Figure 29. Female-headed Families in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1970



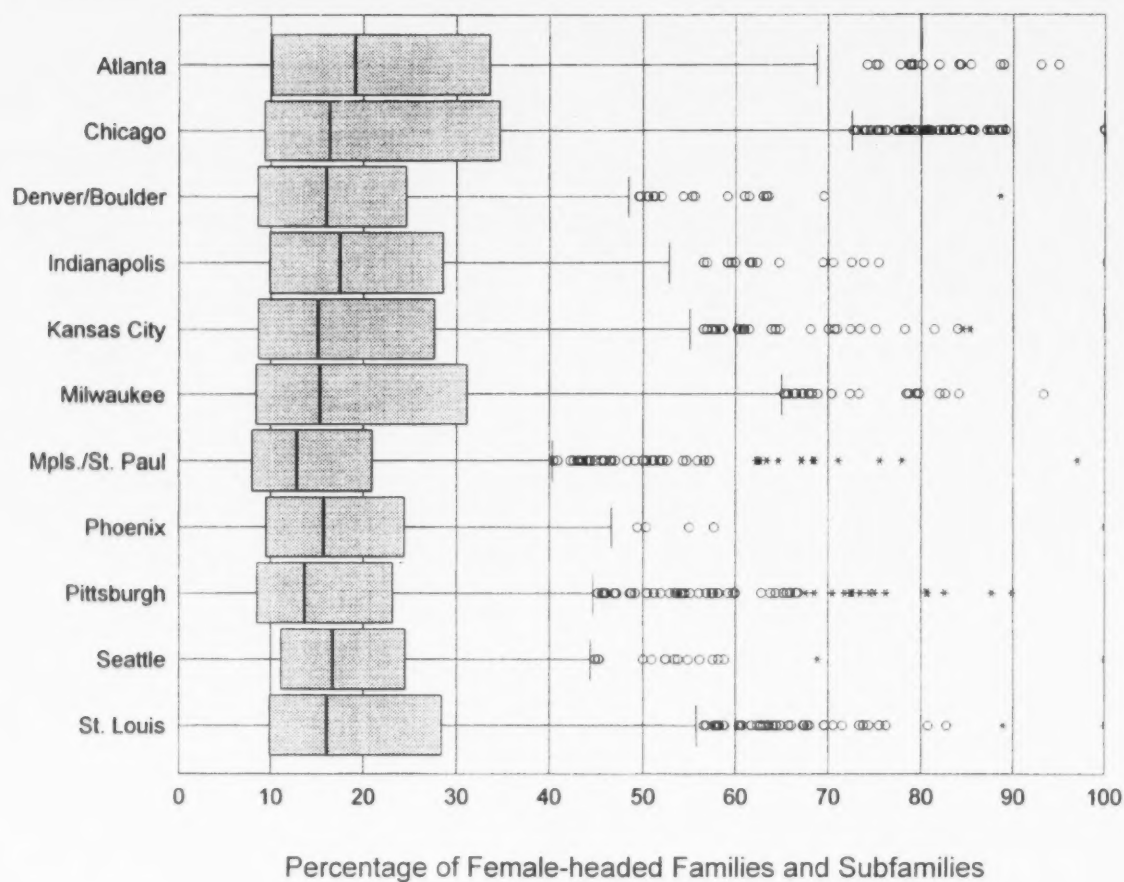
Note: See pages 28-30 for an explanation of how to read this distribution.

Table 5. Census Tracts with 40 Percent or More of Families and Subfamilies Headed by Females, Selected Metropolitan Areas, 1970-90

Metropolitan Areas	Number of Tracts, 1970 (percent)	Number of Tracts, 1980 (percent)	Number of Tracts, 1990 (percent)
Atlanta	21 (6)	74 (20)	110 (30)
Chicago	121 (8)	315 (21)	428 (21)
Denver	9 (2)	26 (6)	41 (9)
Indianapolis	7 (3)	35 (13)	49 (18)
Kansas City	19 (5)	60 (15)	100 (25)
Milwaukee	14 (4)	75 (20)	115 (31)
Mpls.-St. Paul	17 (3)	57 (9)	78 (13)
Phoenix	3 (< 1)	15 (4)	24 (7)
Pittsburgh	29 (4)	70 (10)	121 (18)
Seattle	6 (2)	26 (7)	17 (5)
St. Louis	29 (7)	82 (19)	113 (26)

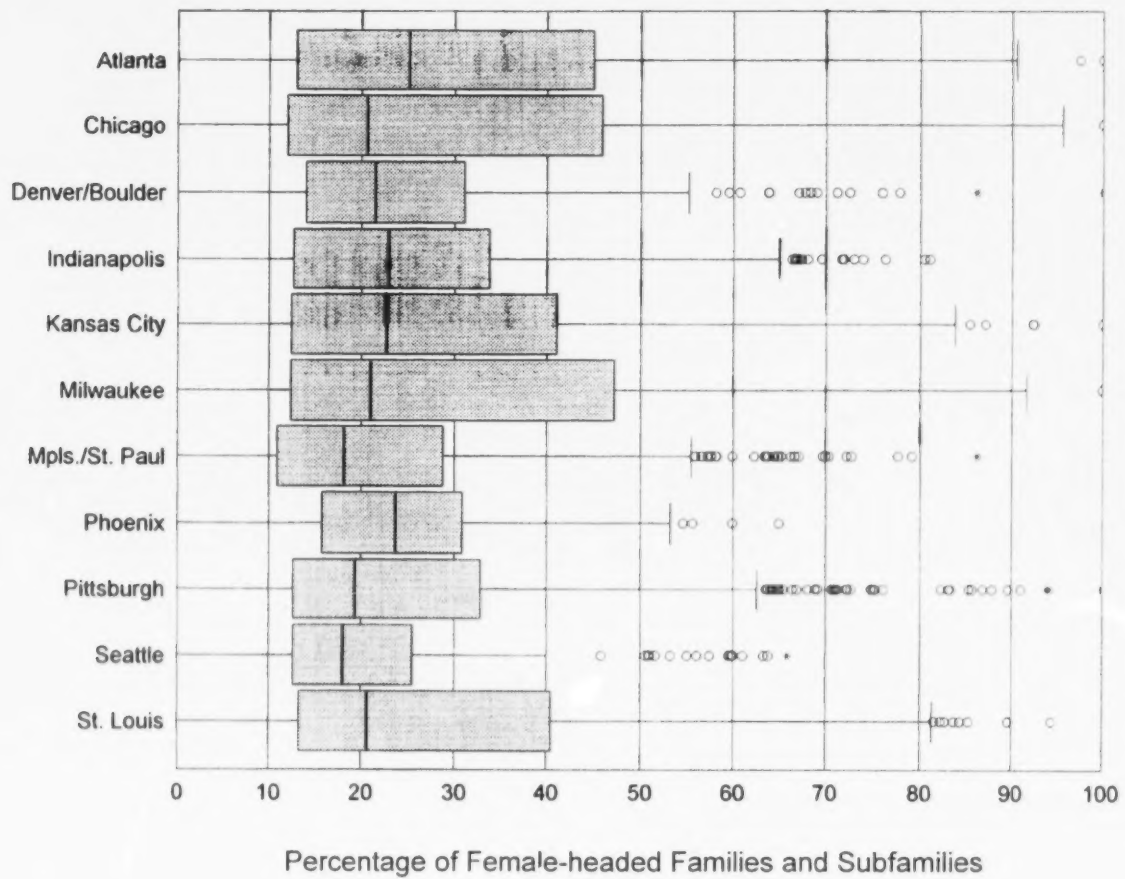
Source: Urban Institute Under Class Data Base. Calculations by the authors.

Figure 30. Female-headed Families in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1980



Note: See pages 28-30 for an explanation of how to read this distribution.

Figure 31. Female-headed Families in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1990



Note: See pages 28-30 for an explanation of how to read this distribution

Figure 32. Female-headed Families in Atlanta, 1970-90

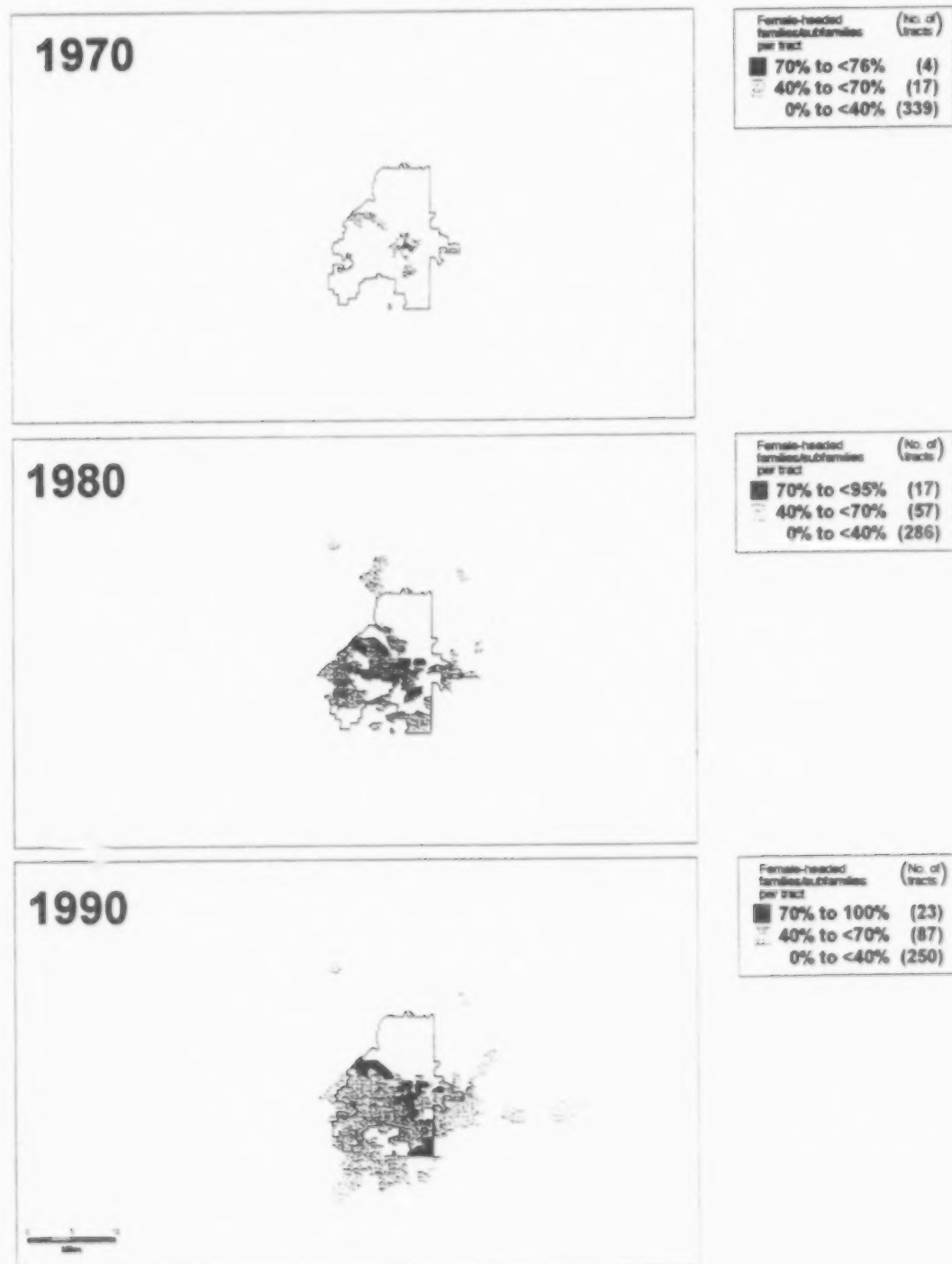


Figure 33. Female-headed Families in Chicago, 1970-90

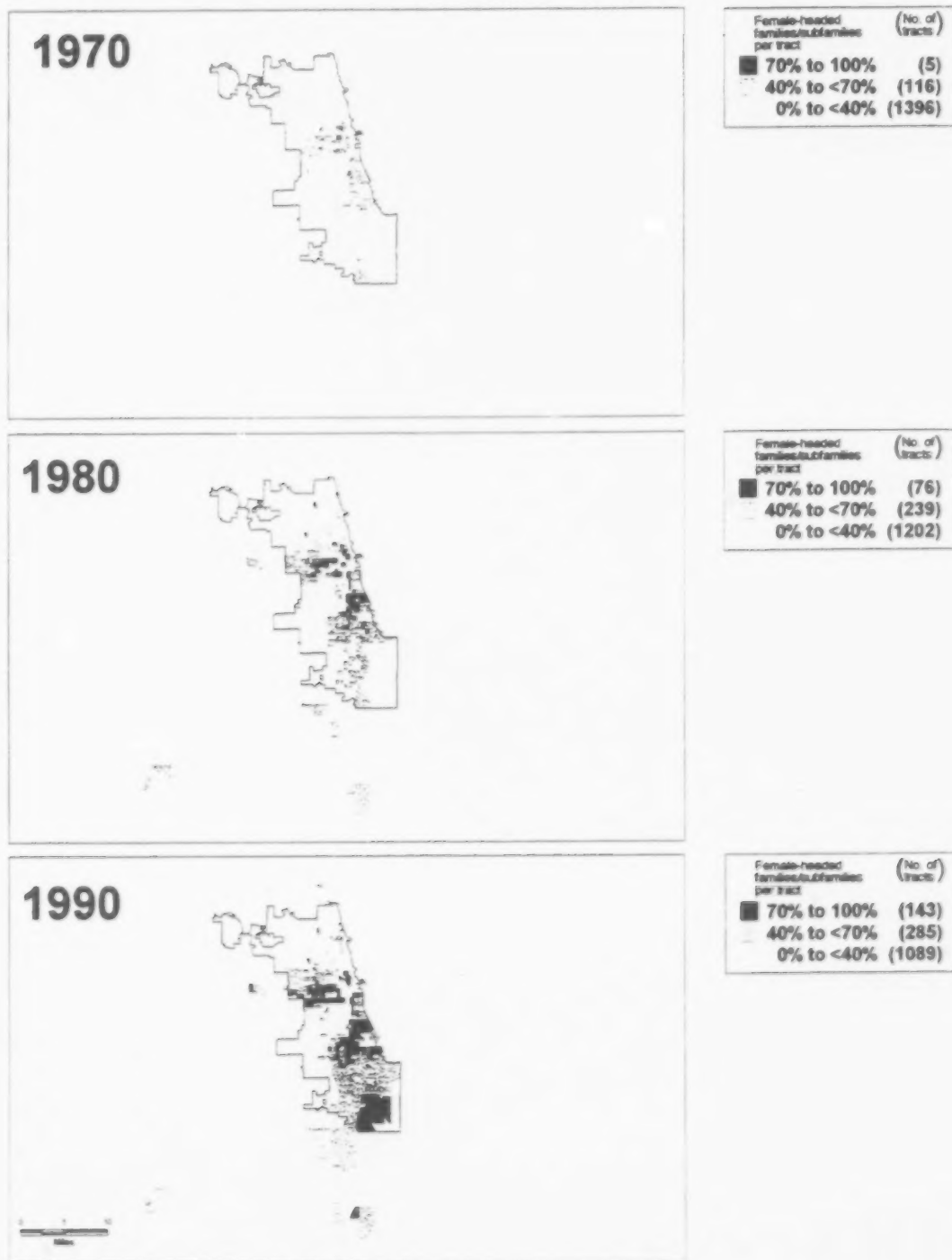


Figure 34. Female-headed Families in Denver, 1970-90

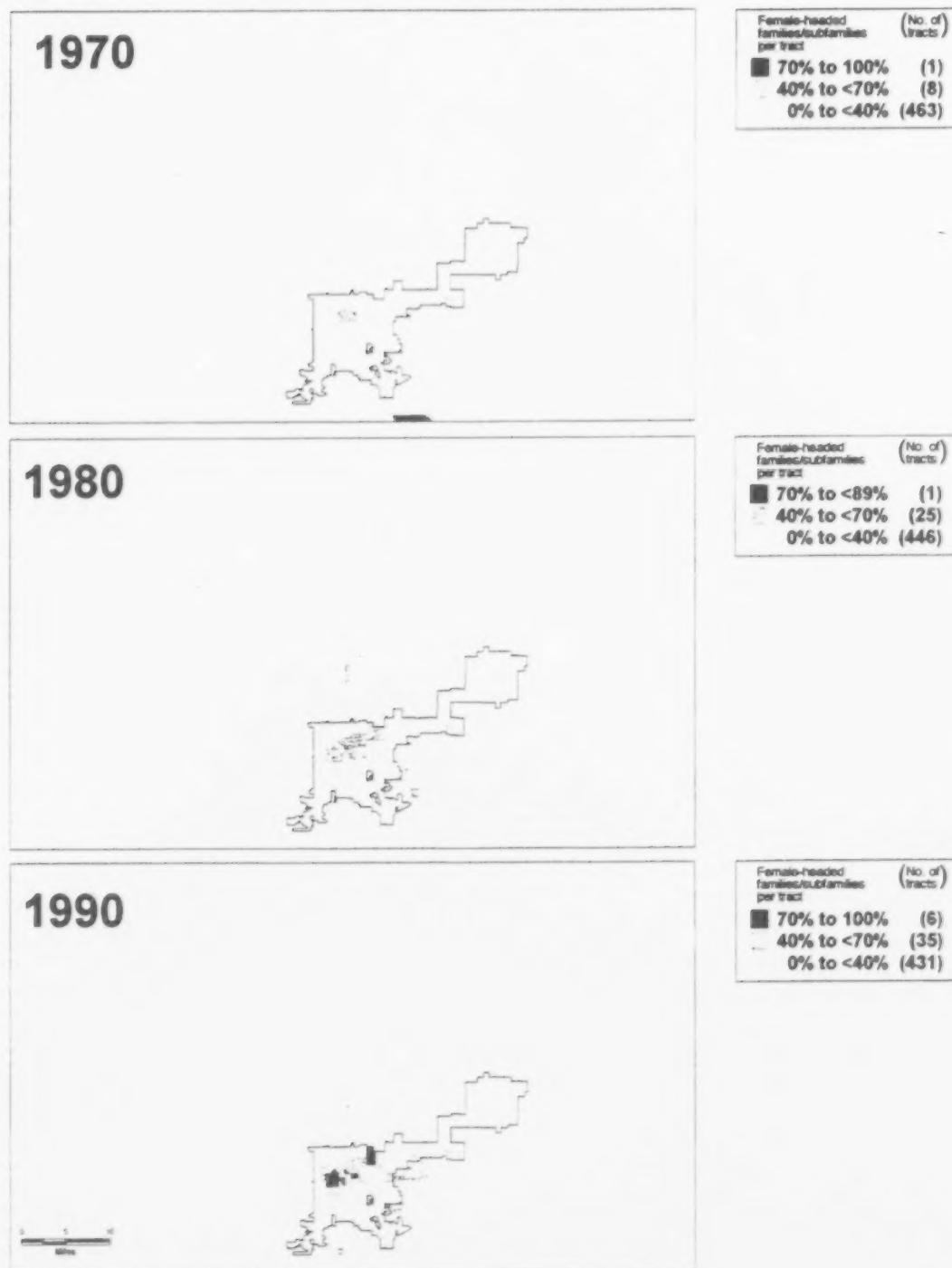


Figure 35. Female-headed Families in Indianapolis, 1970-90

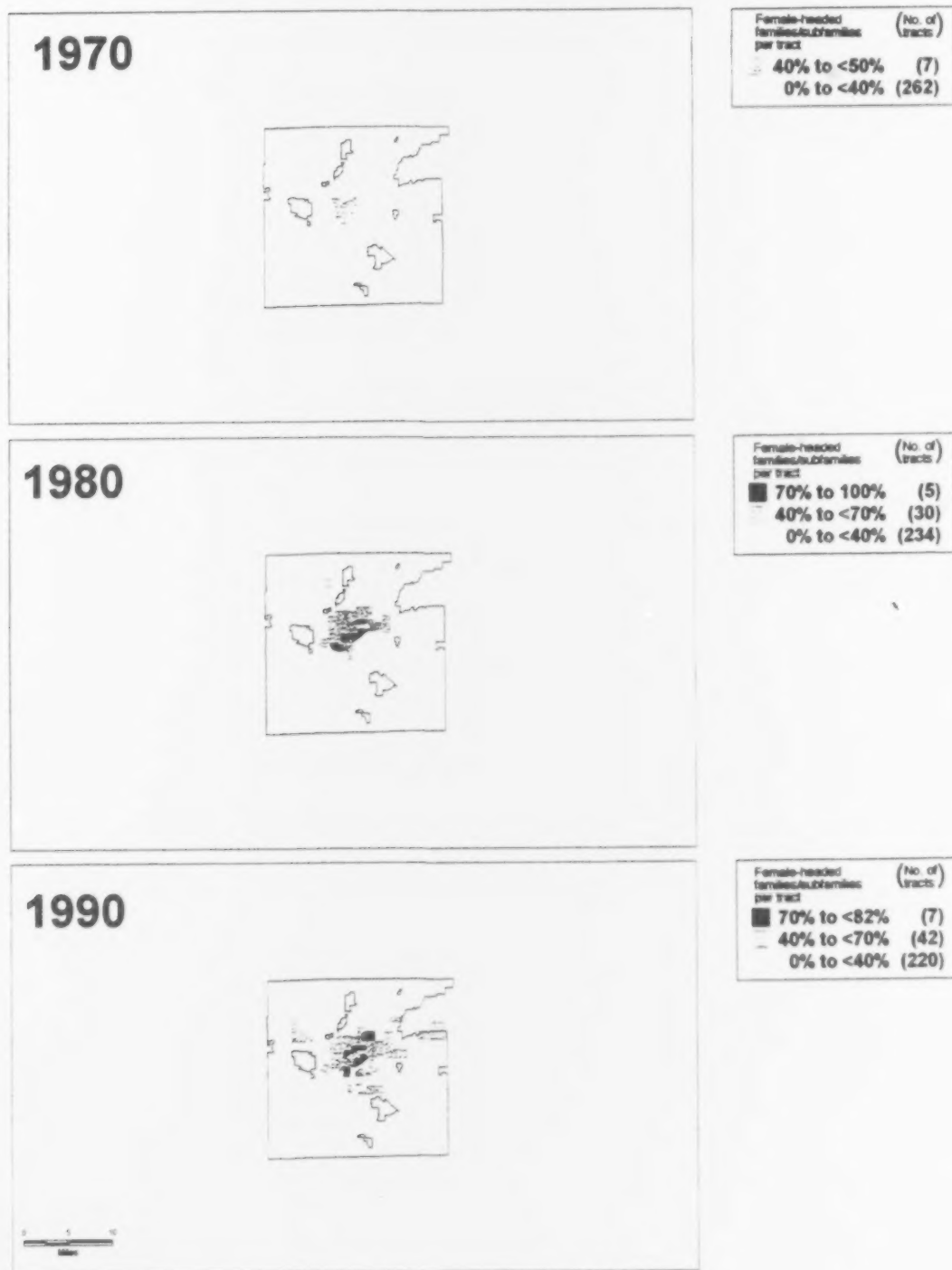


Figure 36. Female-headed Families in Kansas City, 1970-90

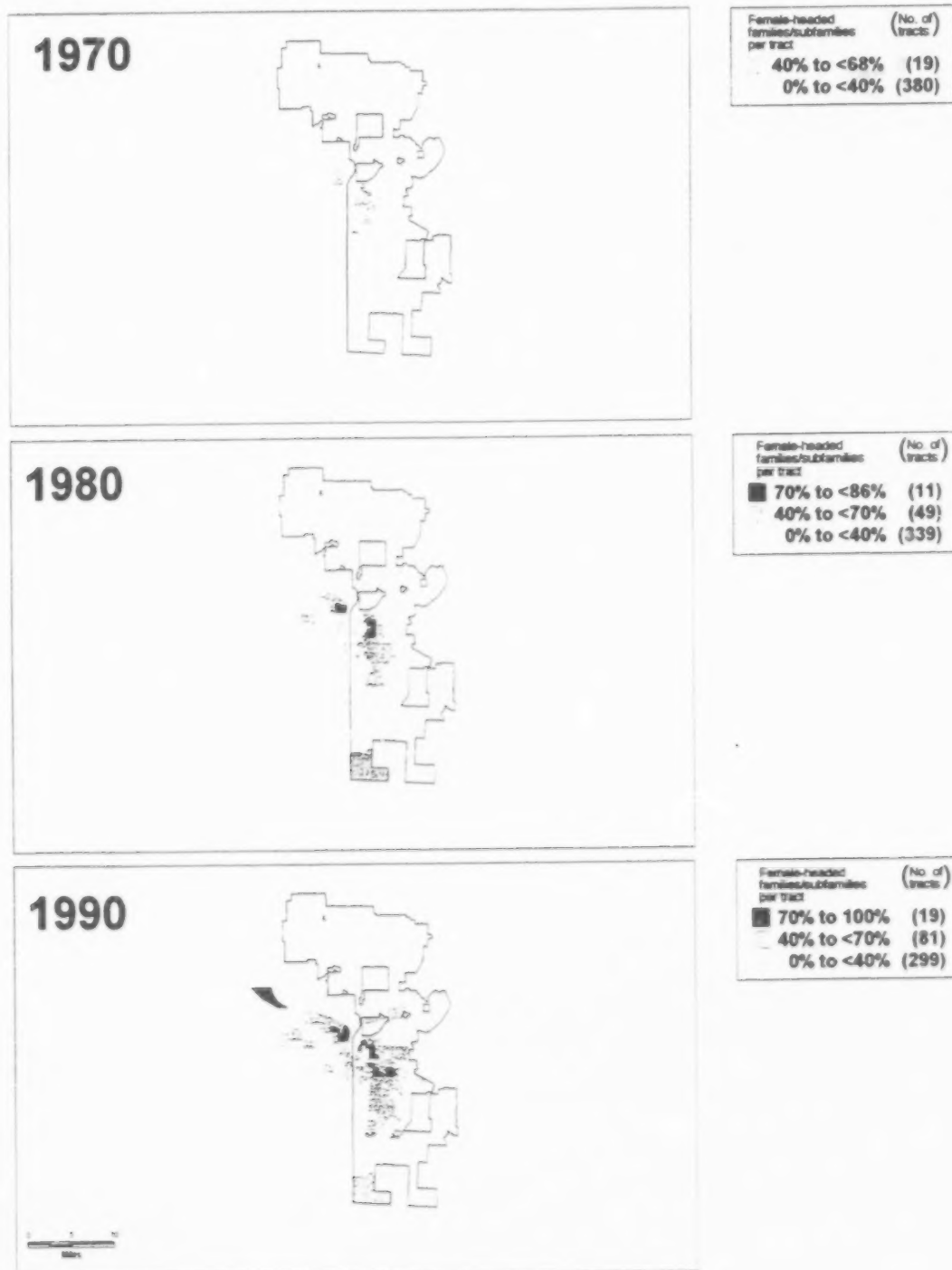


Figure 37. Female-headed Families in Milwaukee, 1970-90

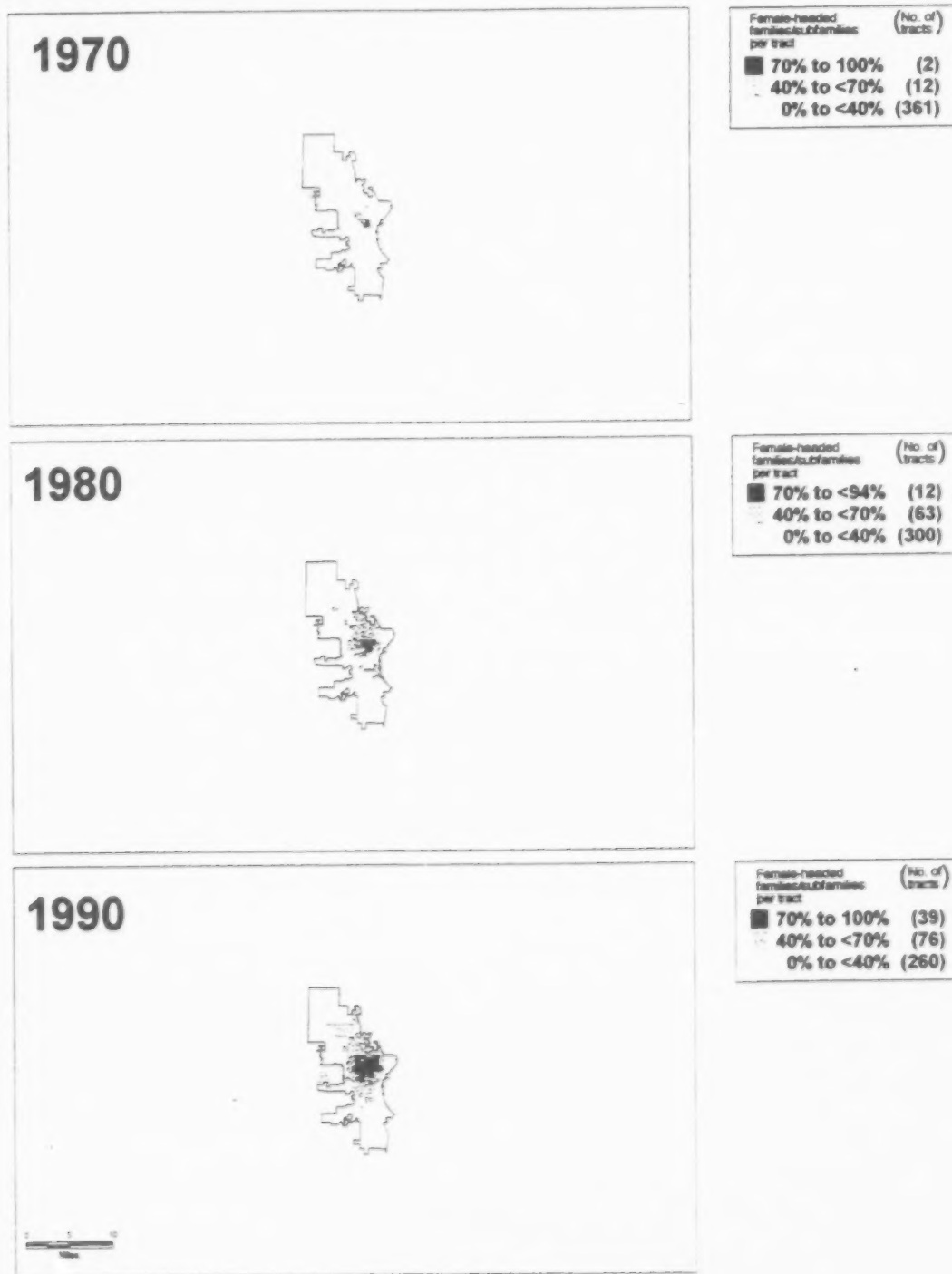


Figure 38. Female-headed Families in Minneapolis-St. Paul, 1970-90

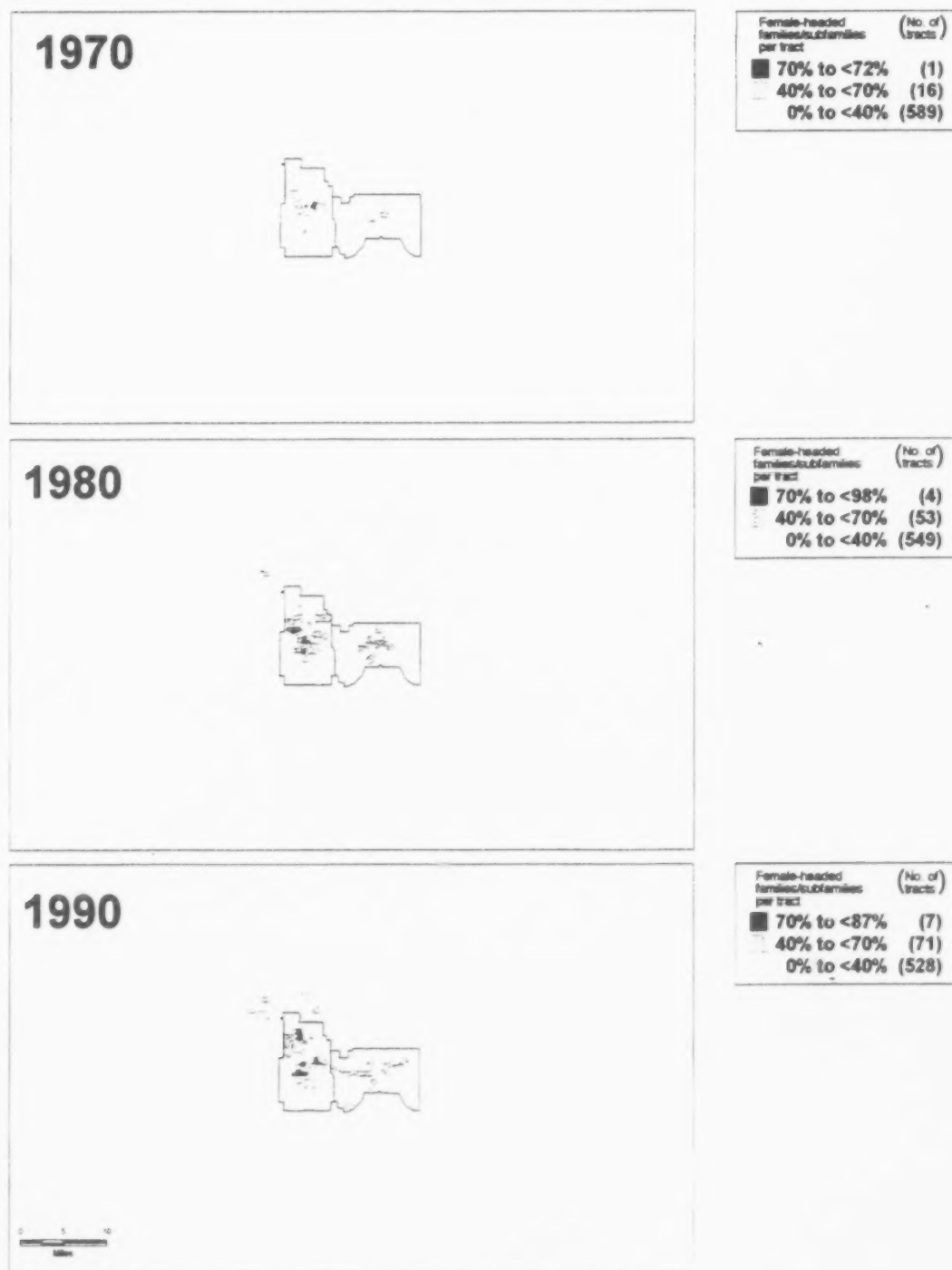


Figure 39. Female-headed Families in Phoenix, 1970-90

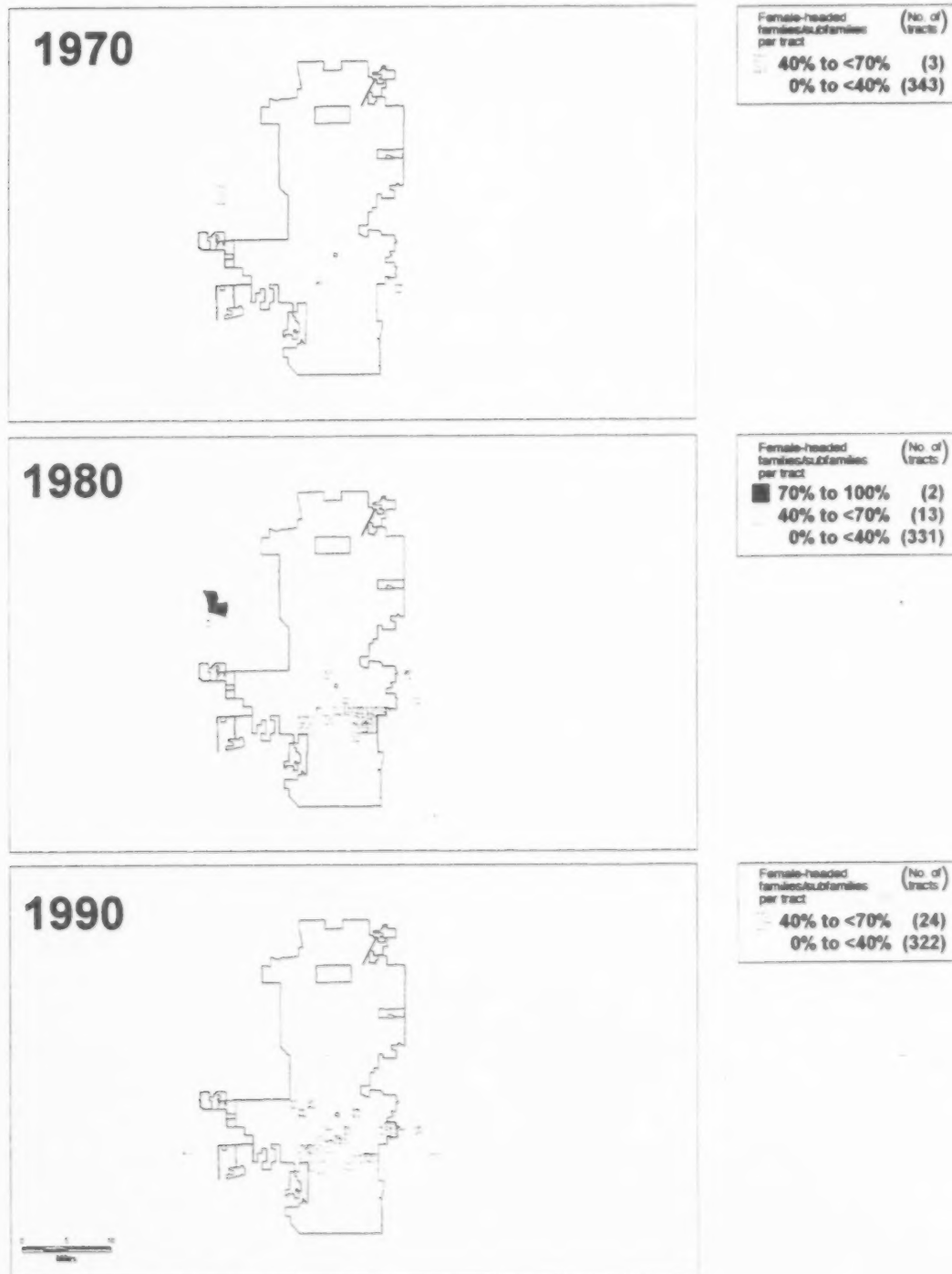


Figure 40. Female-headed Families in Pittsburgh, 1970-90

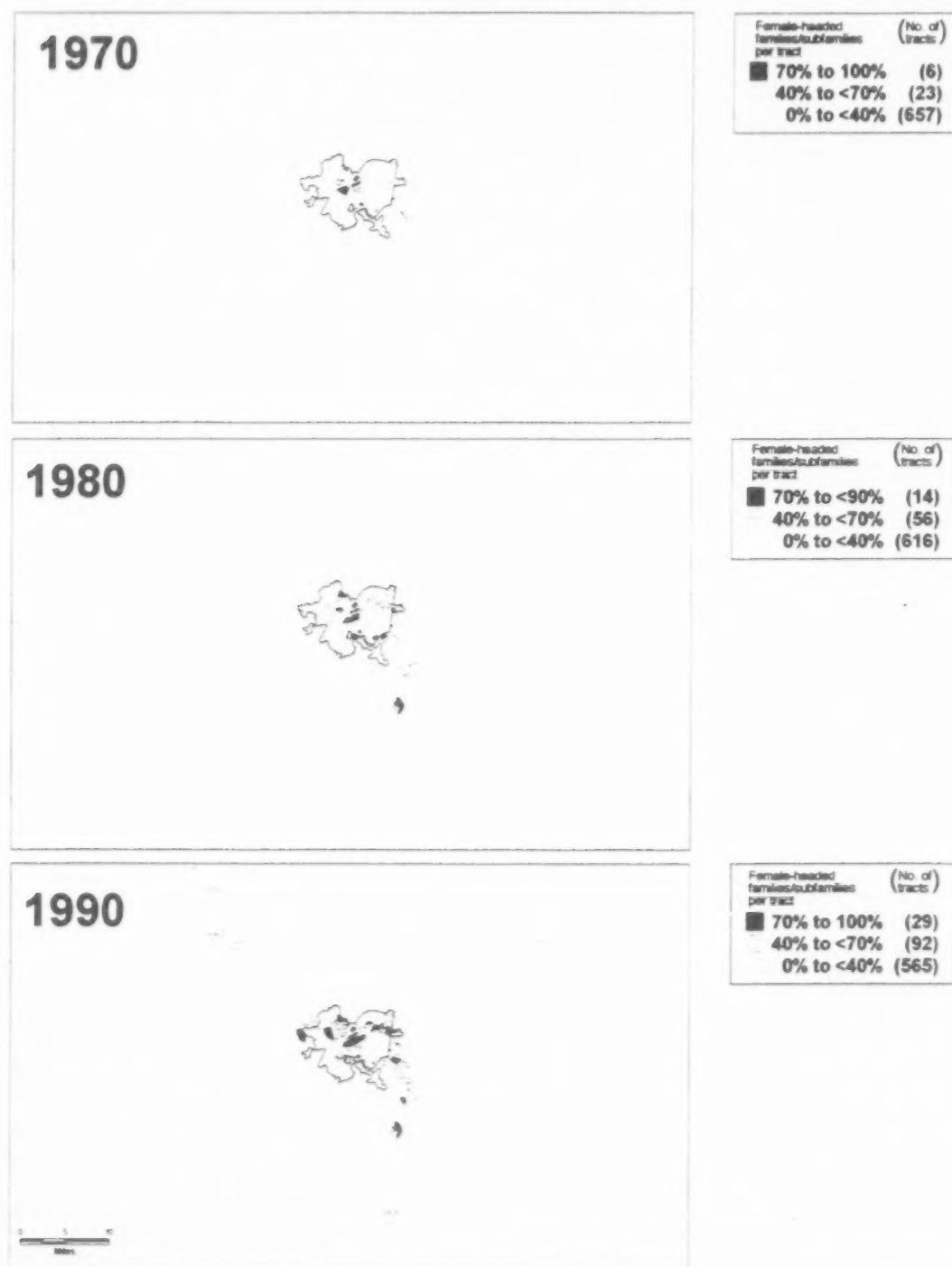


Figure 41. Female-headed Families in Seattle, 1970-90

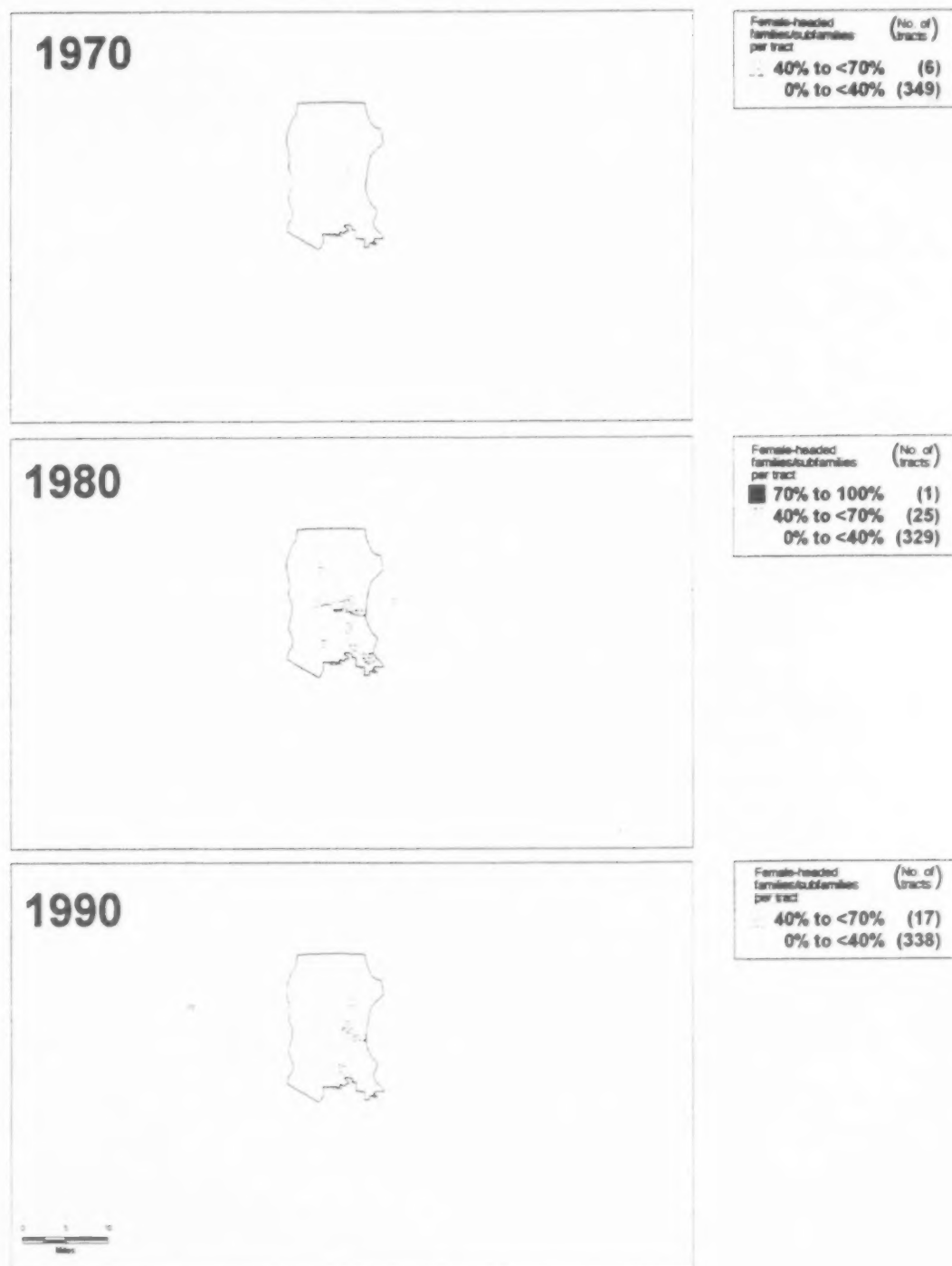
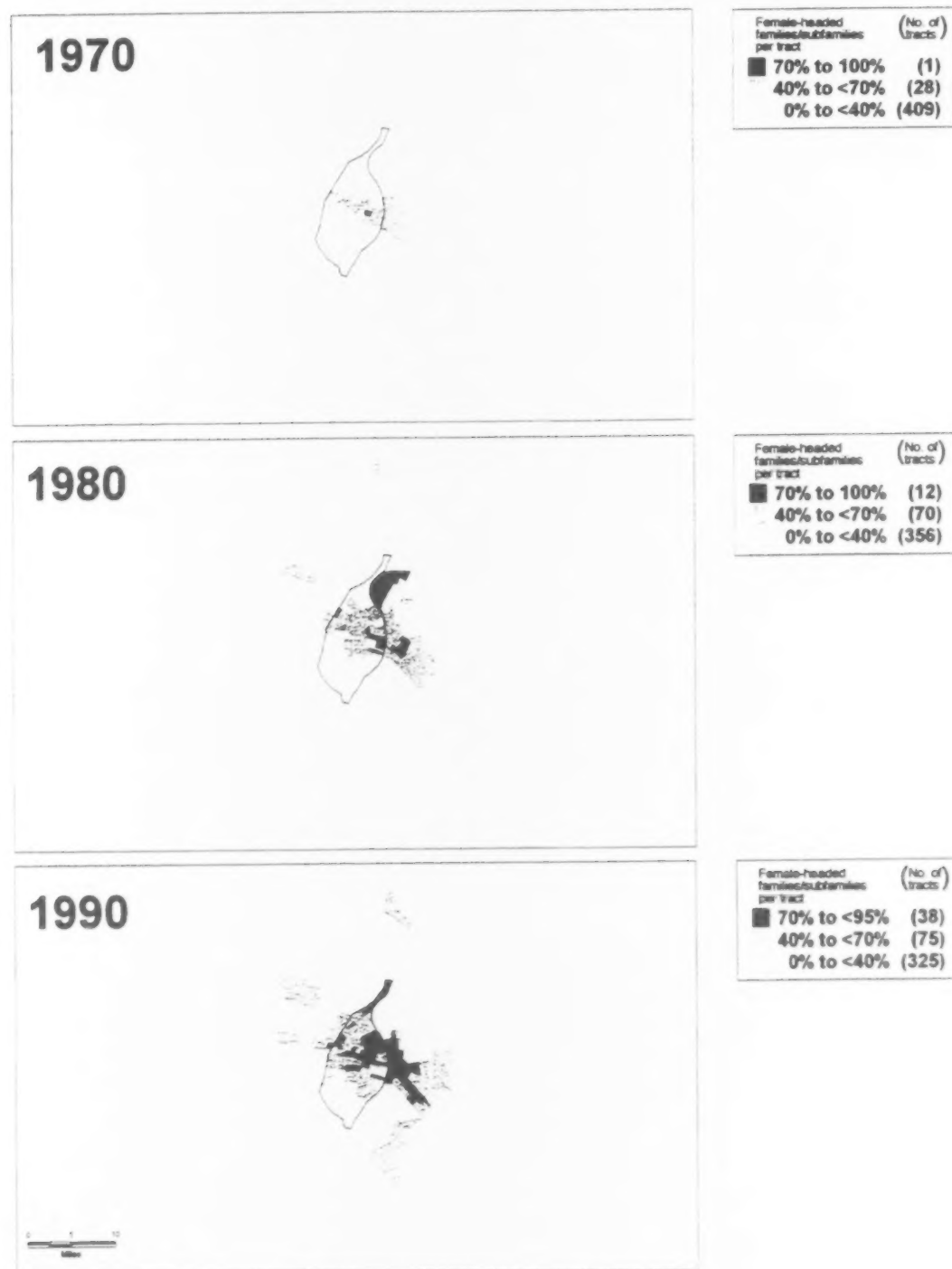


Figure 42. Female-headed Families in St. Louis, 1970-90



High School Dropouts in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1970-90

In 1970, 26 percent of all persons 25 years old and over in the United States had not completed high school. In the years that followed, this ratio dropped, to 16 percent in 1980, and to 14 percent, or 22 million persons, in 1990. In 1992 the rate was still declining. The overall rate of noncompletion is high partly because many older Americans failed to finish school at a time when early school-leaving was common. But among younger Americans, high school dropout rates remain troublesomely high. The dropout rate for persons 14 to 24 years of age stood at over 12 percent, or one in eight, in 1970, remained at 12 percent through 1980, then dropped slightly to 11 percent by the 1990s. By 1991 the dropout rate for white persons 14 to 24 years old was 10.5 percent; for black persons, just over 11 percent; and for Hispanic persons, almost 30 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993b, Table 262).

Among the eleven metropolitan areas in this study, the 1970 median dropout rate by census tract for teenagers 16 to 19 years old varied from lows in the Denver area (8 percent), Minneapolis-St. Paul (6 percent), and Pittsburgh (8 percent), to a high in Atlanta (18 percent) (Figure 43). Every area had one or more tracts with dropout rates over 50 percent; Chicago had several tracts with rates over 60 percent.

By 1980 the medians had moved little. Some rose slightly and some dropped, while the range of the medians narrowed from a low in Pittsburgh (6 percent) to a high in Phoenix (16 percent) (Figure 44). Meanwhile, however, the number of tracts with extremely high dropout rates increased rapidly. All cities featured tracts with rates exceeding 50 percent, although the Twin Cities and Pittsburgh registered fewer than 1 percent of their tracts at that high rate. The 1990 statistical profile was little changed from 1980 (Figure 45). Ranges narrowed for all areas except the Twin Cities (where the range expanded slightly) and Pittsburgh. All areas had tracts with rates exceeding 50 percent.

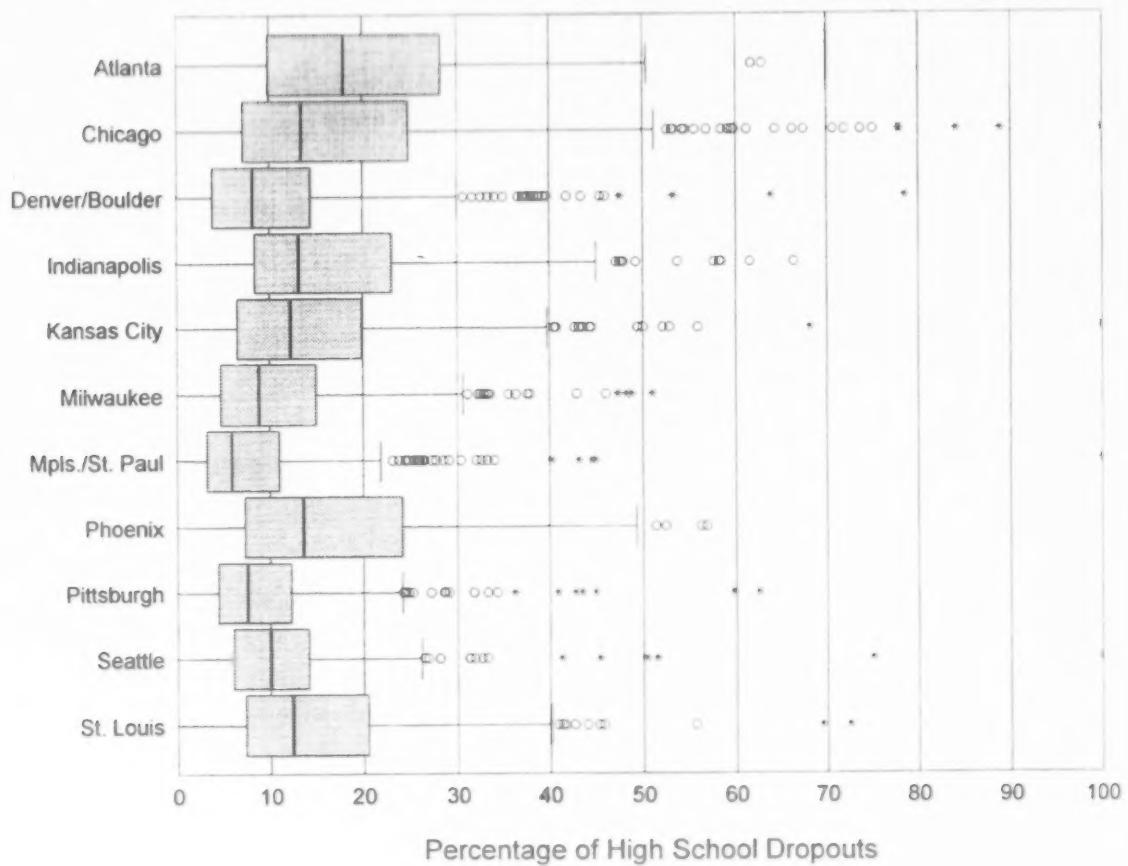
The maps of high school dropout rates reflect the statistical distributions for each urban area, but patterns on the maps vary from those shown on the poverty maps, public assistance maps, and maps of female-headed families and subfamilies. In Atlanta, for example, the concentrations of high dropout rates occur in two places: in poor areas of the inner city and in outer suburbs and nearby exurban areas (Figure 46). High dropout rates in the inner-city areas were expected, but dropout concentrations in outer suburbs came as a surprise. This phenomenon may reflect higher dropout rates in quasi-rural settings encompassed within the metropolitan area boundaries. The other maps in the series display the same general inner-city/suburban patterns (Figures 47-56).

In this array, the Twin Cities area compares favorably with the others (Table 6). The number of Twin Cities tracts with high school dropout rates exceeding 50 percent reached a peak of five in 1980, then dropped to three in 1990. All but the Seattle area have a somewhat

greater number of tracts with extremely high rates on this measure, while Chicago has quite a few more (twenty-seven such tracts in 1990), nearly four times as many as next-place Indianapolis.

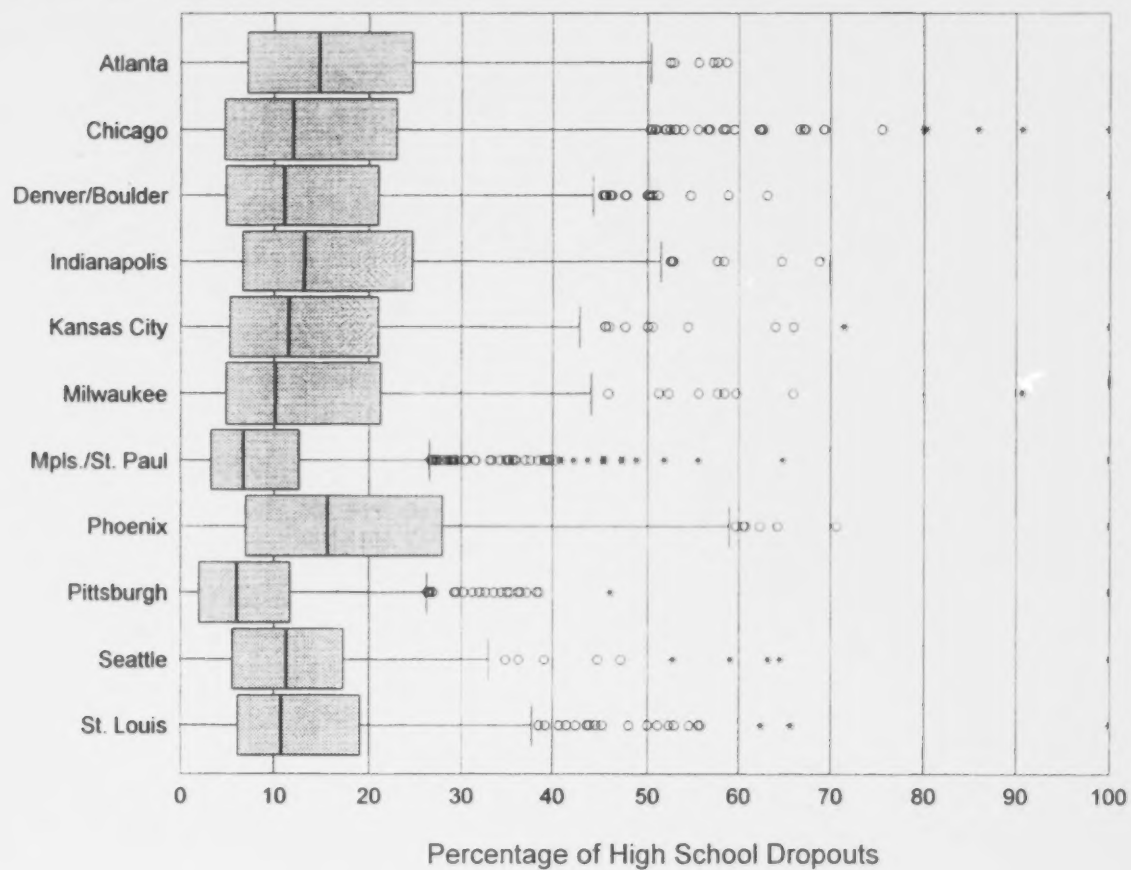
Thus, although overall school dropout rates were improving slowly nationwide and metropolitan area-wide, persons who had dropped out of school were becoming increasingly concentrated geographically. This is probably due to the arguments advanced earlier: deficiencies in schooling hamper employment prospects; marginal employment contributes to poverty; and poverty confines persons to the oldest and cheapest housing in the urban area, which is disproportionately centered near the metropolitan cores.

Figure 43. High School Dropout Rates in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1970



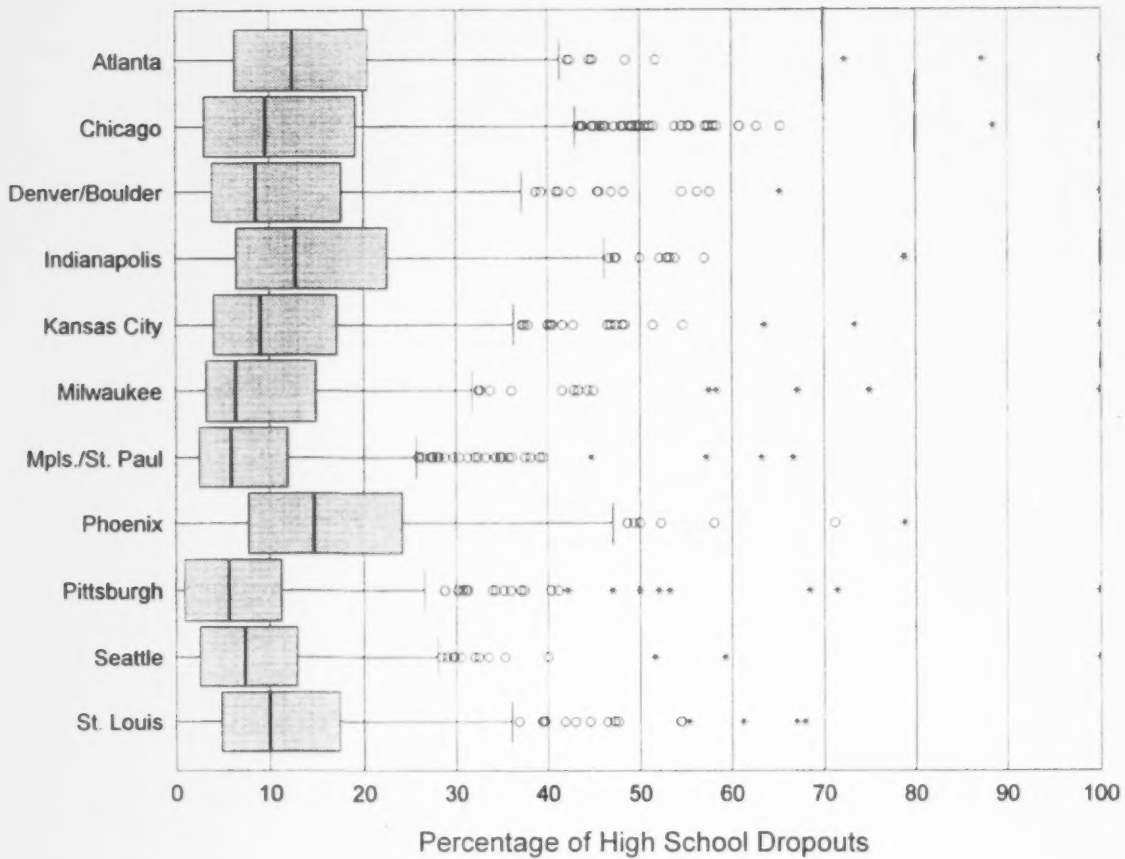
Note: See pages 28-30 for an explanation of how to read this distribution

Figure 44. High School Dropout Rates in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1980



Note: See pages 28-30 for an explanation of how to read this distribution

Figure 45. High School Dropout Rates in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1990



Note: See pages 28-30 for an explanation of how to read this distribution

Figure 46. High School Dropout Rate in Atlanta, 1970-90

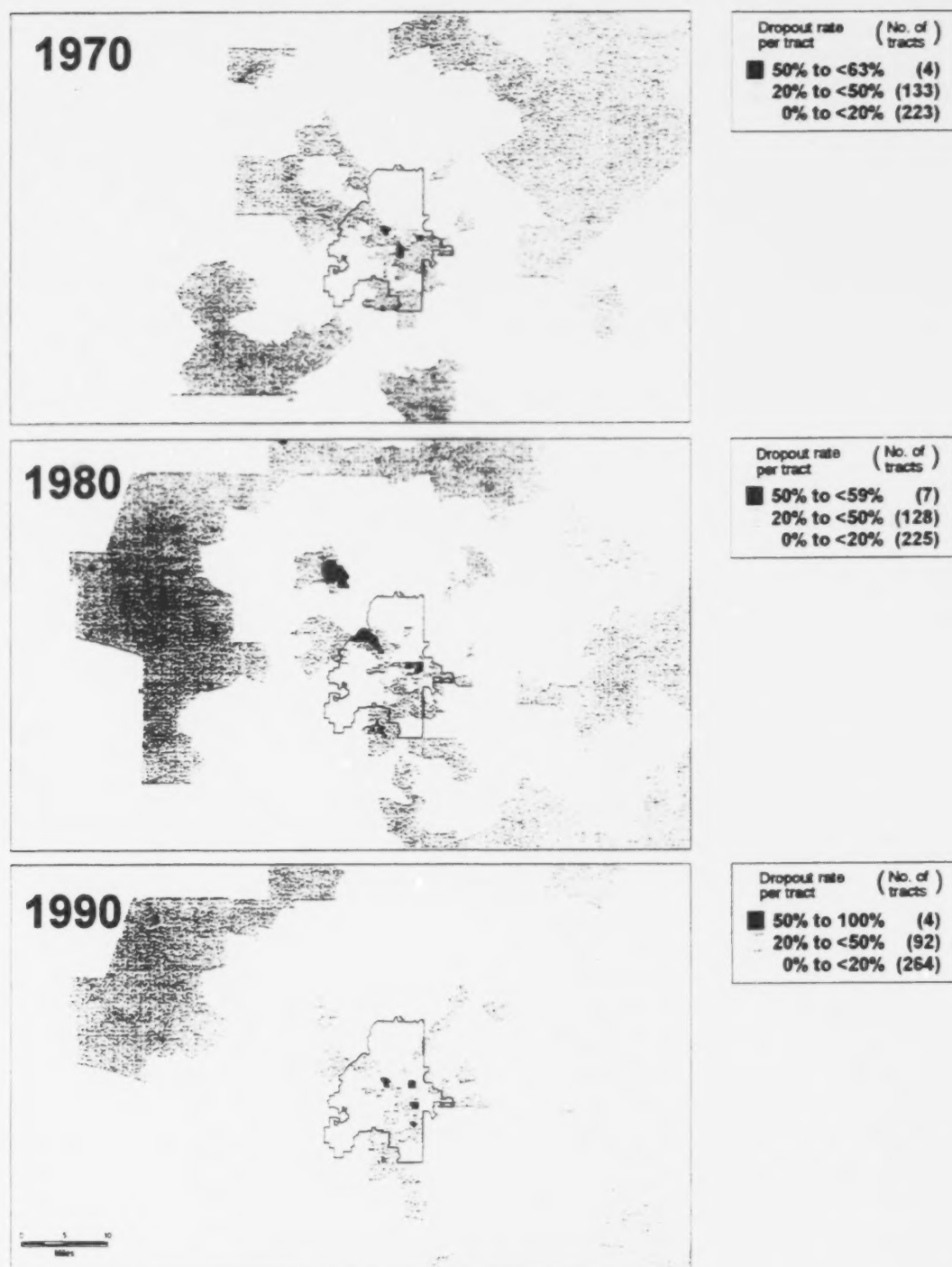


Figure 47. High School Dropout Rate in Chicago, 1970-90

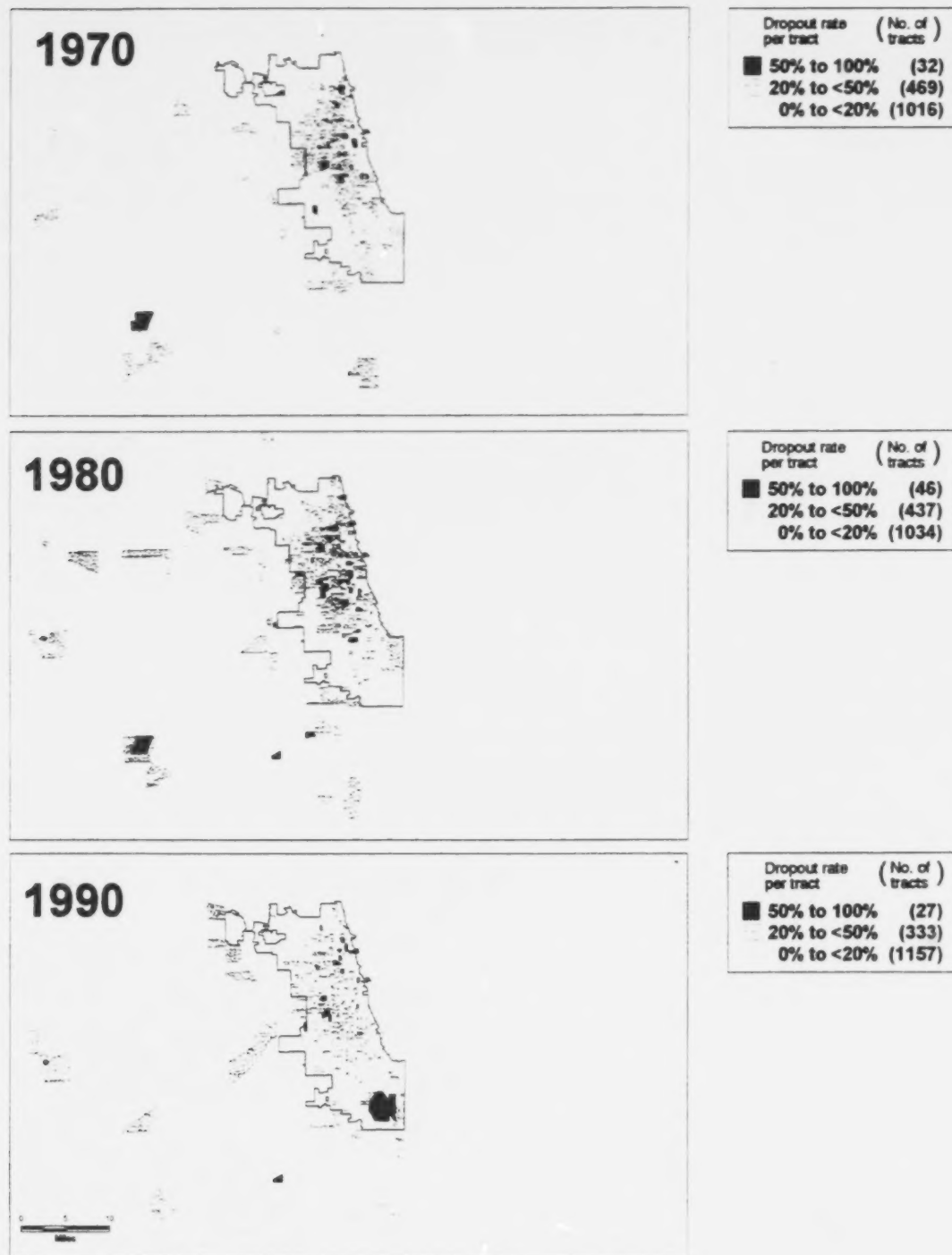


Figure 48. High School Dropout Rate in Denver, 1970-90

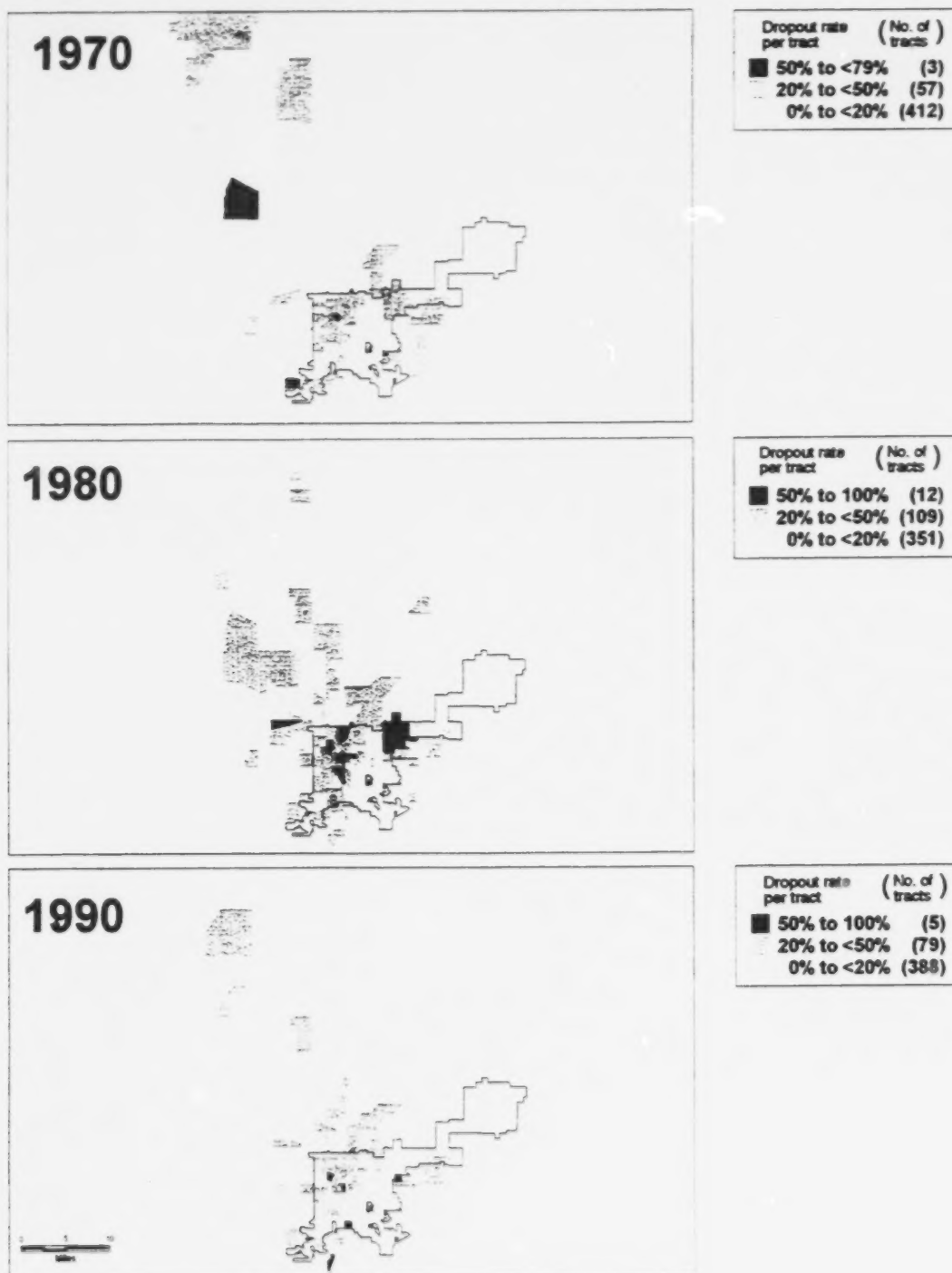


Figure 49. High School Dropout Rate in Indianapolis, 1970-90

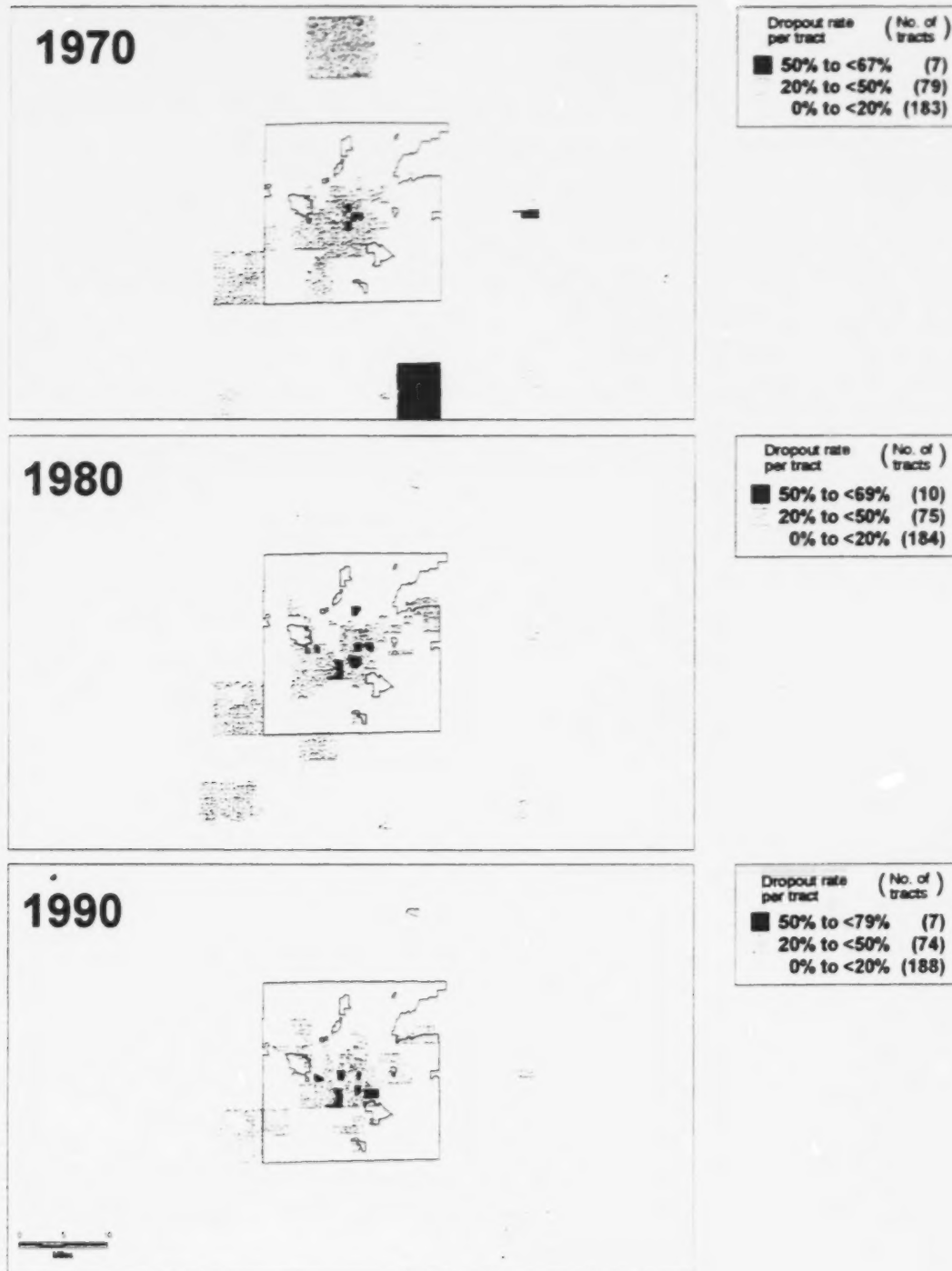


Figure 50. High School Dropout Rate in Kansas City, 1970-90

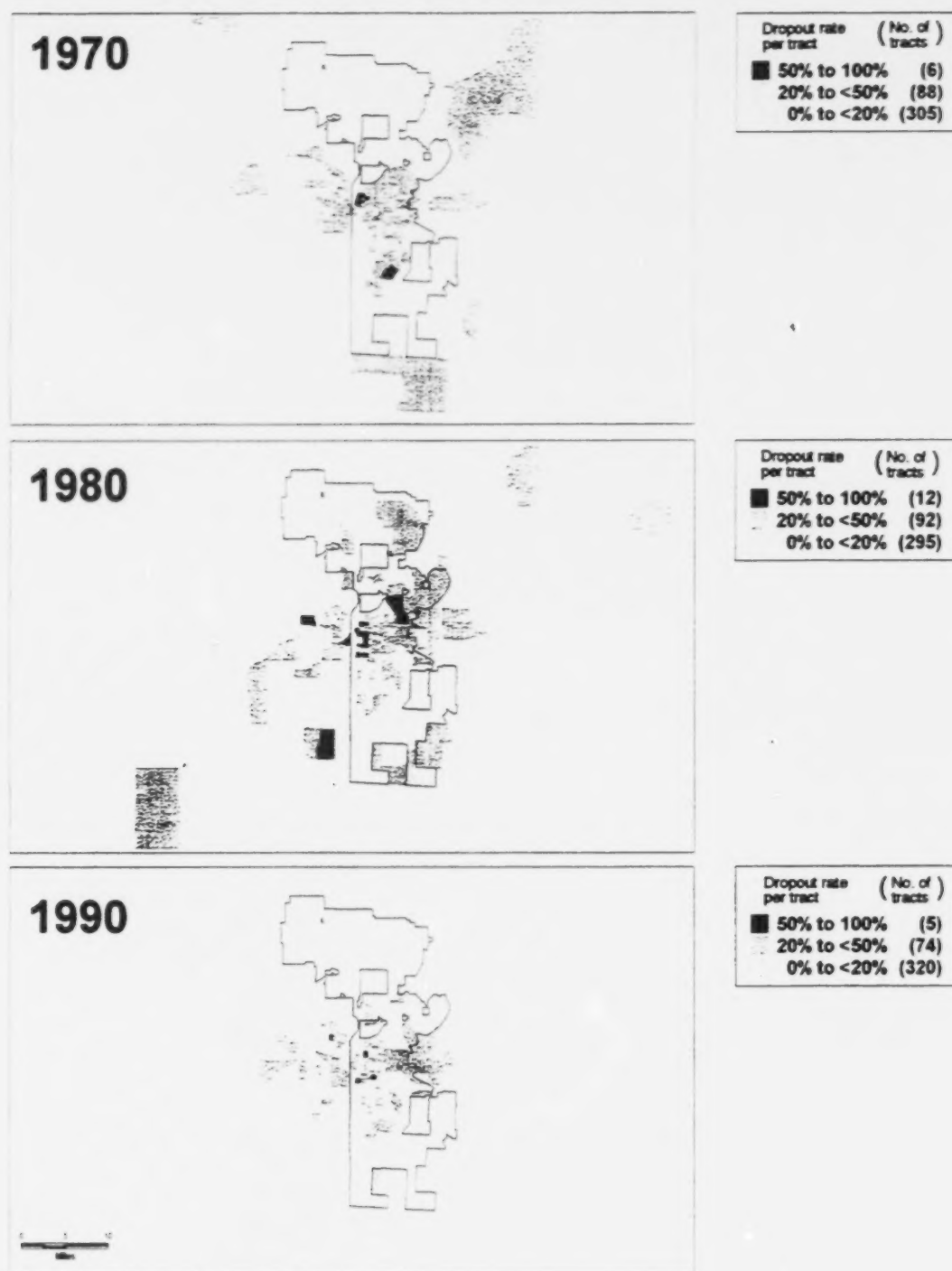


Figure 51. High School Dropout Rate in Milwaukee, 1970-90

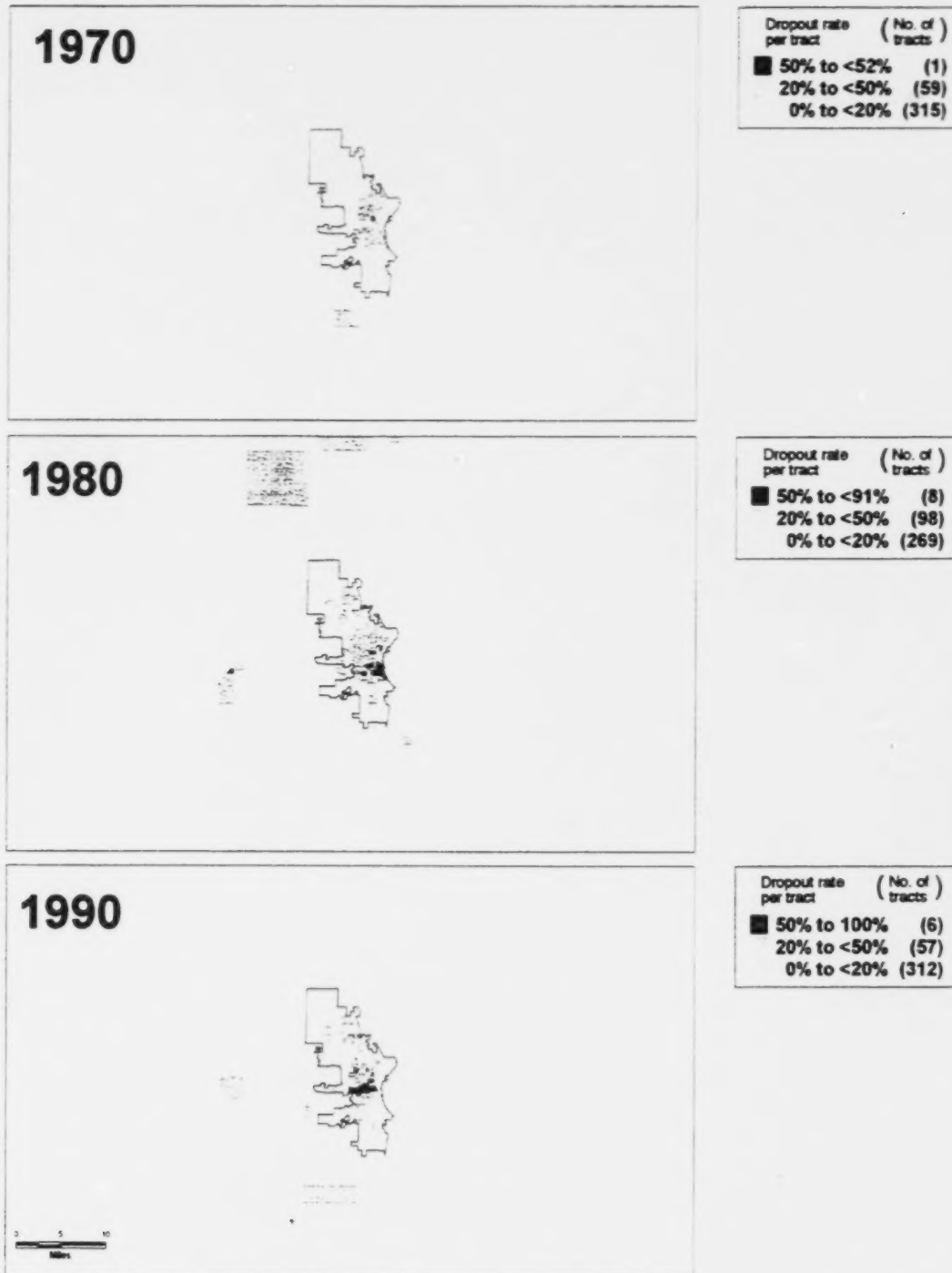


Figure 52. High School Dropout Rate in Minneapolis-St. Paul, 1970-90

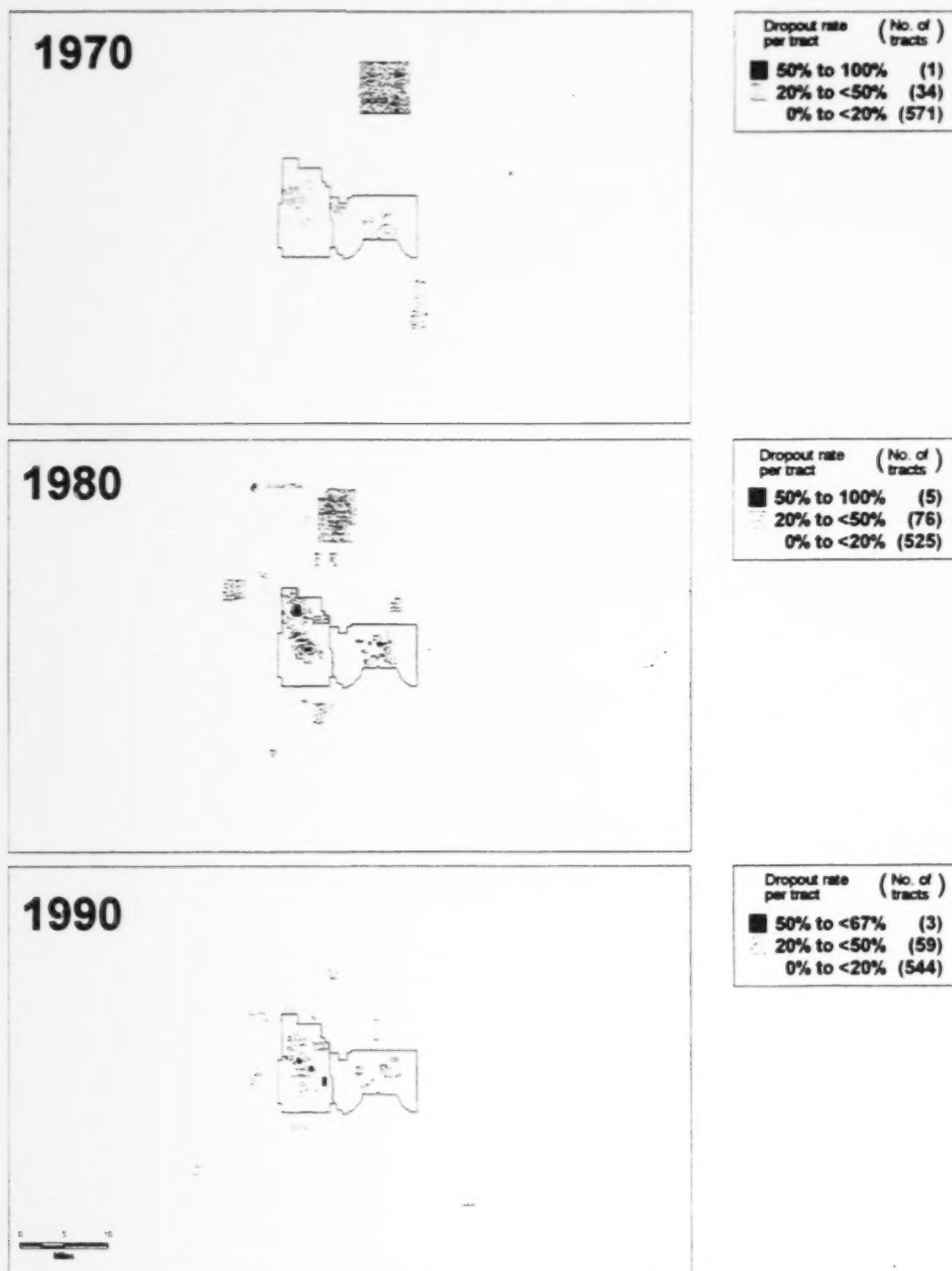


Figure 53. High School Dropout Rate in Phoenix, 1970-90

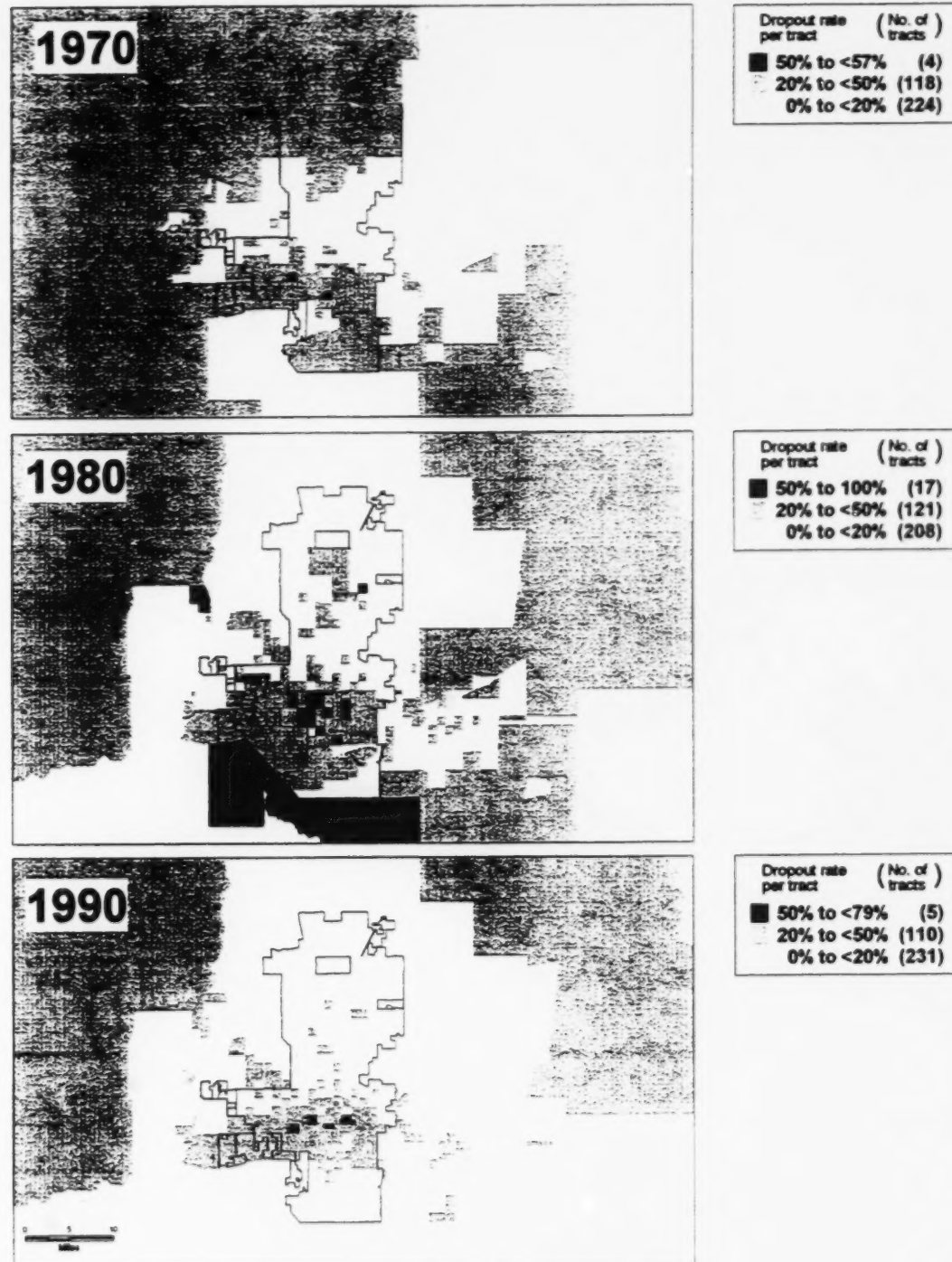


Figure 54. High School Dropout Rate in Pittsburgh, 1970-90

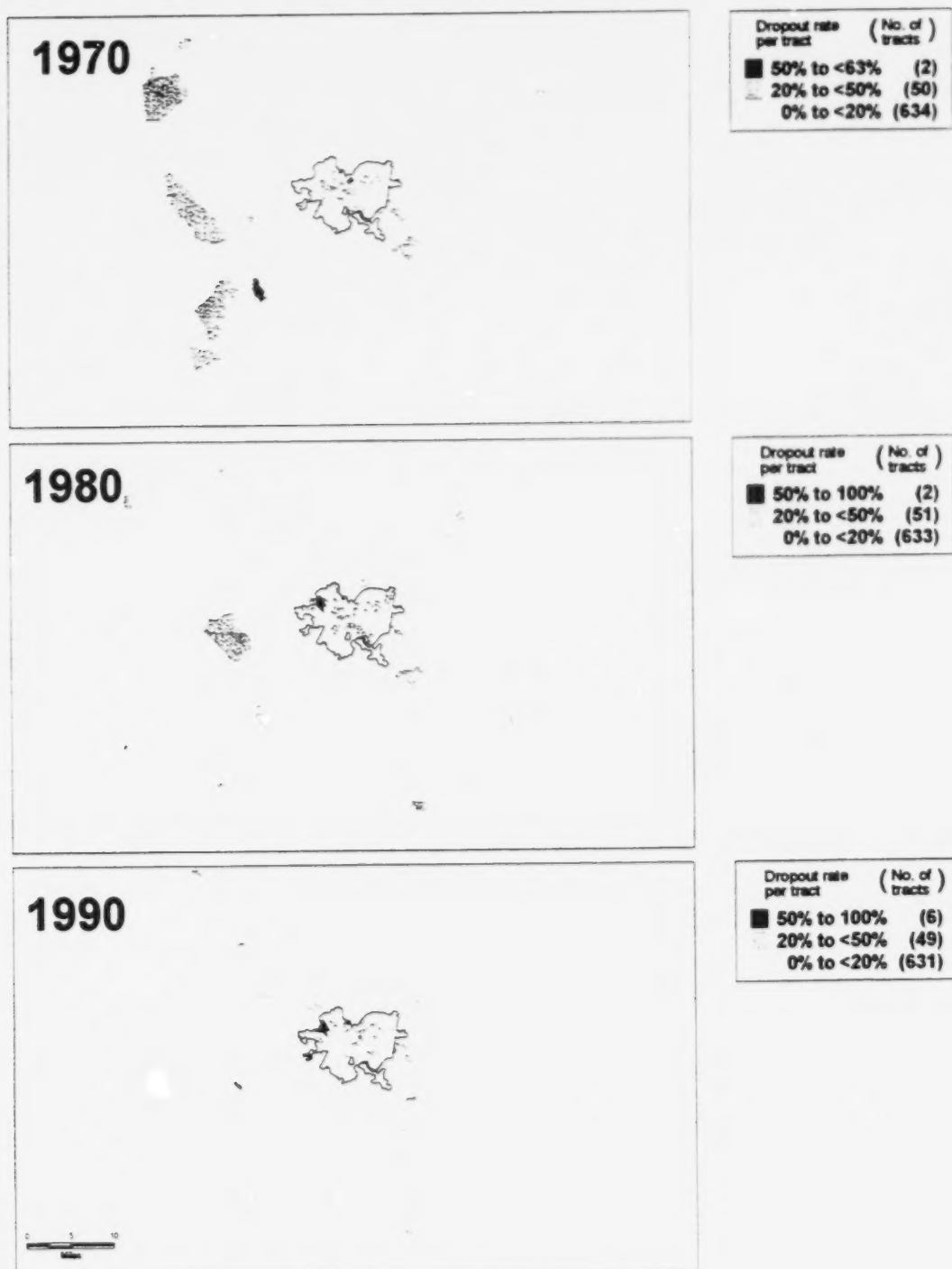


Figure 55. High School Dropout Rate in Seattle, 1970-90

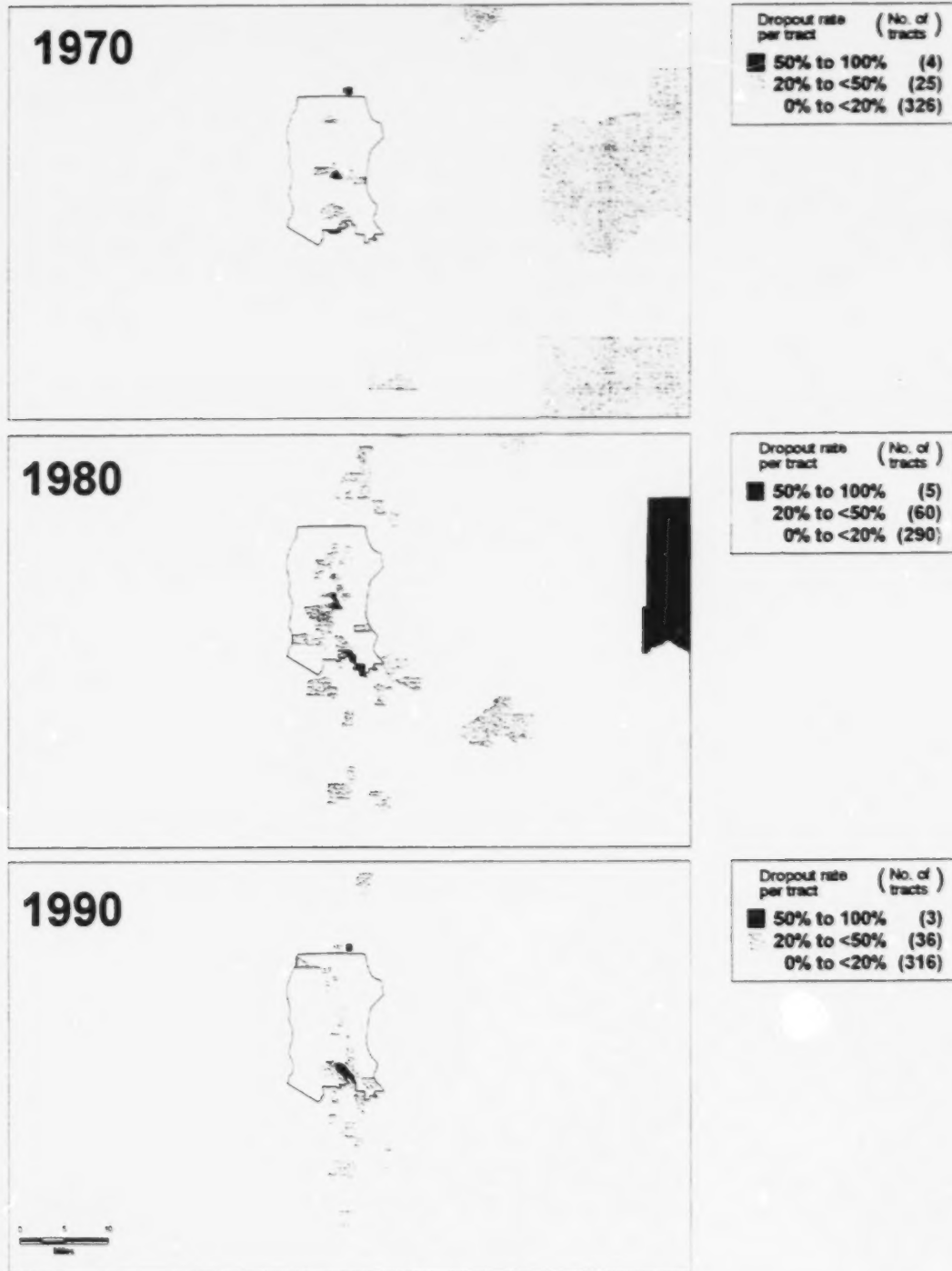


Figure 56. High School Dropout Rate in St. Louis, 1970-90

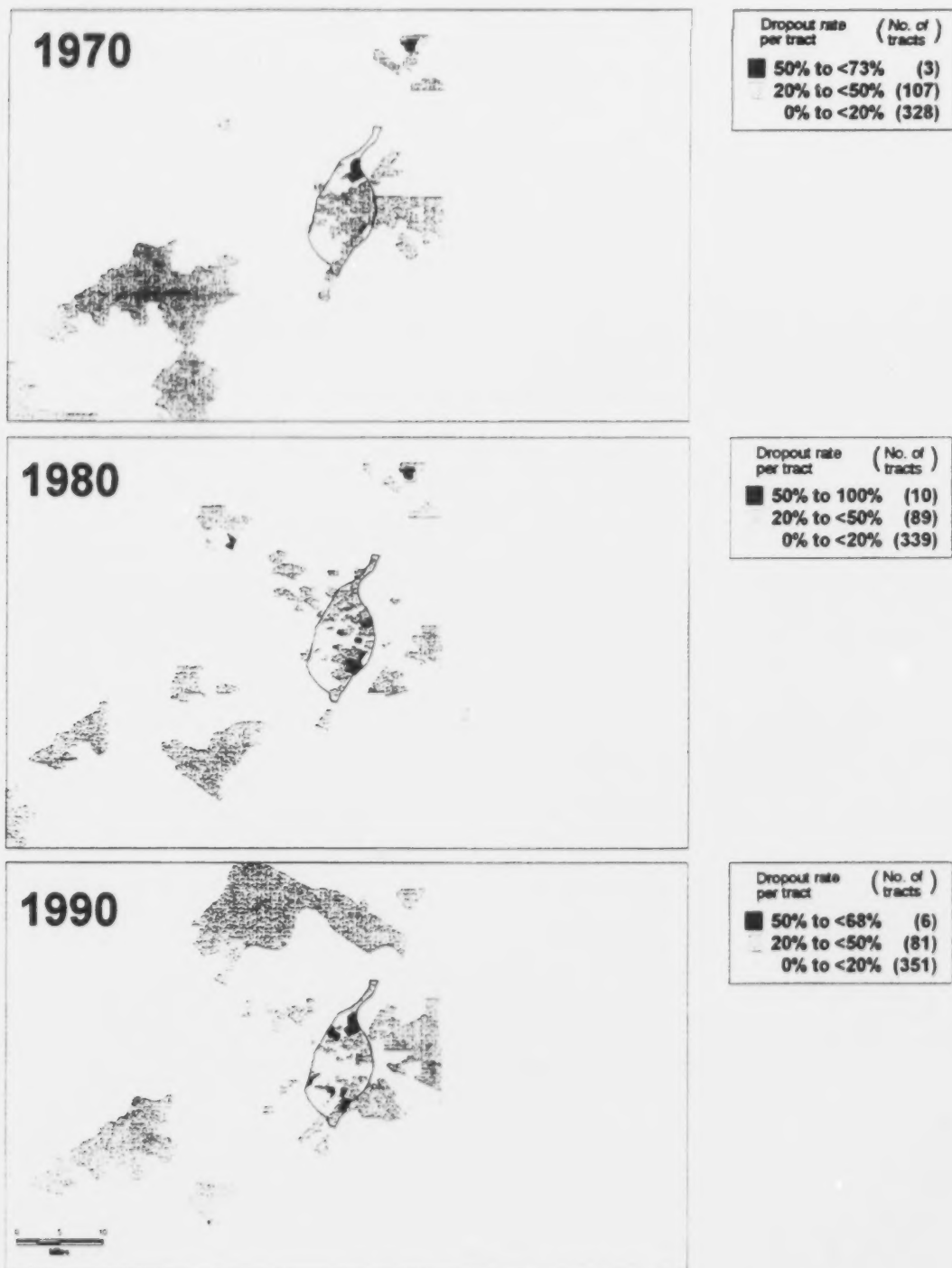


Table 6. Census Tracts with High School Dropout Rates of 50 Percent or Greater for Teenagers Aged 16 to 19, Selected Metropolitan Areas, 1970-90

Metropolitan Areas	Number of Tracts, 1970 (percent)	Number of Tracts, 1980 (percent)	Number of Tracts, 1990 (percent)
Atlanta	4 (1)	7 (2)	4 (1)
Chicago	32 (2)	46 (3)	27 (2)
Denver	3 (<i>< 1</i>)	12 (3)	5 (1)
Indianapolis	7 (3)	10 (4)	7 (3)
Kansas City	6 (2)	12 (3)	5 (1)
Milwaukee	1 (<i>< 1</i>)	8 (2)	6 (2)
Mpls.-St. Paul	1 (<i>< 1</i>)	5 (<i>< 1</i>)	3 (<i>< 1</i>)
Phoenix	4 (1)	17 (5)	5 (1)
Pittsburgh	2 (<i>< 1</i>)	2 (<i>< 1</i>)	6 (<i>< 1</i>)
Seattle	4 (1)	5 (1)	3 (<i>< 1</i>)
St. Louis	3 (<i>< 1</i>)	10 (2)	6 (1)

Source: Urban Institute Under Class Data Base. Calculations by the authors.

Unemployed and Underemployed Males in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1970-90

According to U.S. Bureau of the Census and U.S. Department of Labor definitions, the civilian labor force comprises all civilians (active-duty military personnel excluded) in the non-institutional population (prison inmates, residents of state hospitals, etc., excluded) 16 years of age and over who are classified either as employed or unemployed. Employed civilians consist of: 1) all civilians who, during the reference week, did any work for pay or profit (minimum of an hour's work) or worked fifteen hours or more as unpaid workers in a family enterprise, and 2) all civilians who were not working but who had jobs or businesses from which they were temporarily absent for noneconomic reasons (illness, weather, vacation, labor-management dispute, etc.), whether they were paid for the time off or were seeking other jobs. Unemployed persons consist of all civilians who had no employment during the reference week, who made specific efforts to find a job within the previous four weeks (such as applying directly to an employer, or to a public employment service, or checking with friends), and who were available for work during that week, except for temporary illness. Persons on layoff or waiting to report to a new job within thirty days are classified as unemployed if they are available for work. All other persons 16 years of age and older are "not in the labor force" (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993, 389-91).

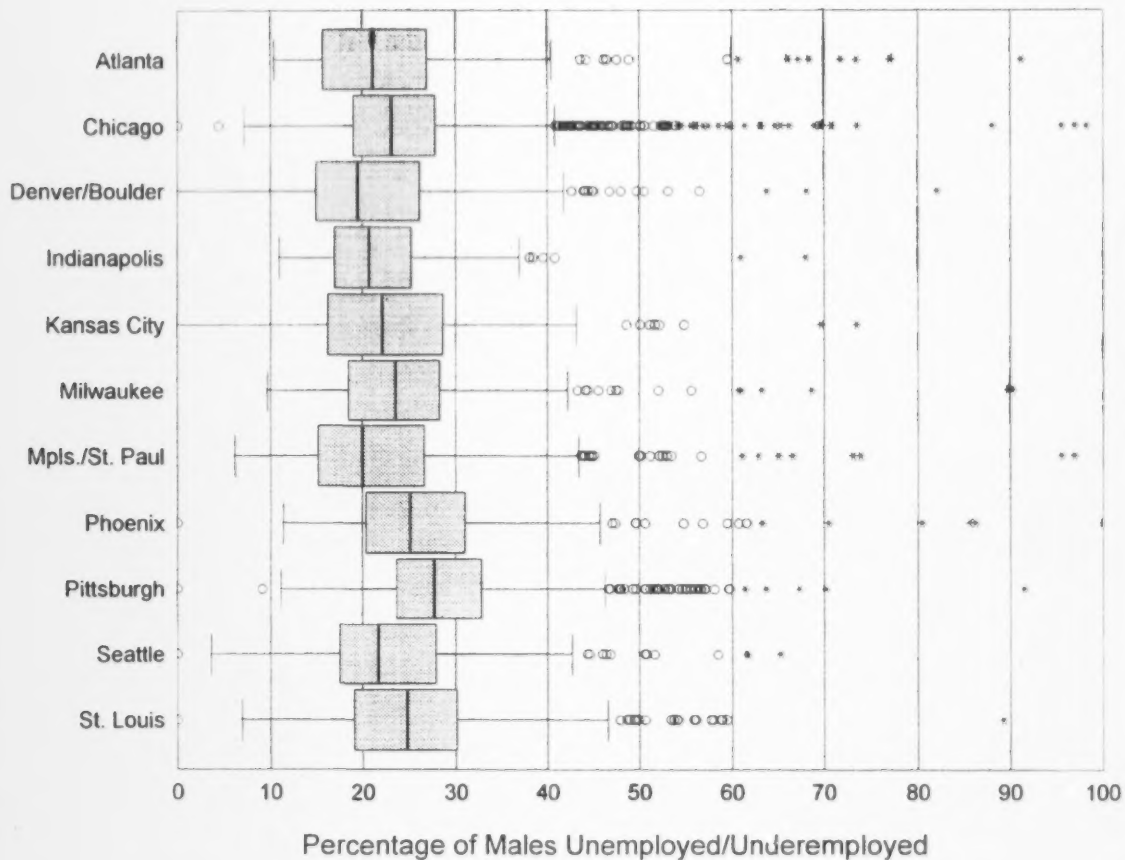
Nationwide, the proportion of all persons age 16 and over not in the labor force—that is, neither employed nor unemployed according to official definitions—dropped from 39 percent in 1970, to 33 percent in 1990. Meanwhile, among males 16 and over, the percentage not in the labor force rose from 20 percent in 1970, to 23 percent in 1980, and to 24 percent in 1990 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993, Tables 621-22). The drop in male labor force participation was accompanied by an increase in female participation, by earlier male retirements, and by extensions of longevity for men coupled with some reduction in birthrates in recent decades. The birthrate decline has meant relatively smaller numbers of young entrants into the labor force in the 1980s and 1990s, compared with the 1970s, when the peak of the post-war baby boom generation was crowding into the labor force.

One of the traditional census measures of unemployment and underemployment, which is used in the Urban Institute Under Class Data Base, is "males 16 years of age and older who worked at least one week but fewer than 26 weeks" in the year preceding the census. This is the measure we used as the index of detachment from the labor force. This measure of weak attachment or nonattachment to the labor force includes both unemployed (available for work and seeking work) as well as those not in the labor force (full-time in school, retired, unable to work, or not wishing to work or to seek work).

In the eleven metropolitan areas the median of tract percentages of males unemployed and underemployed in 1970 varied from 19 to 27 percent. These levels are about what we would expect as an average condition given the national average labor force participation rate

(employed plus unemployed) of 80 percent in 1970 (Figure 57). Although the median tract value for each urban area is close to the national average, there is a wide disparity of values among tracts in each metropolitan area. Every urban area had tracts with 60 percent or more of their adult males unattached to the labor force in 1970, Chicago with the most and St. Louis with the fewest (Table 7). In that year, the Minneapolis-St. Paul area had eight tracts with male unemployment/underemployment rates exceeding 60 percent.

Figure 57. Male Unemployment/Underemployment Rates in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1970



Note: See pages 28-30 for an explanation of how to read this distribution

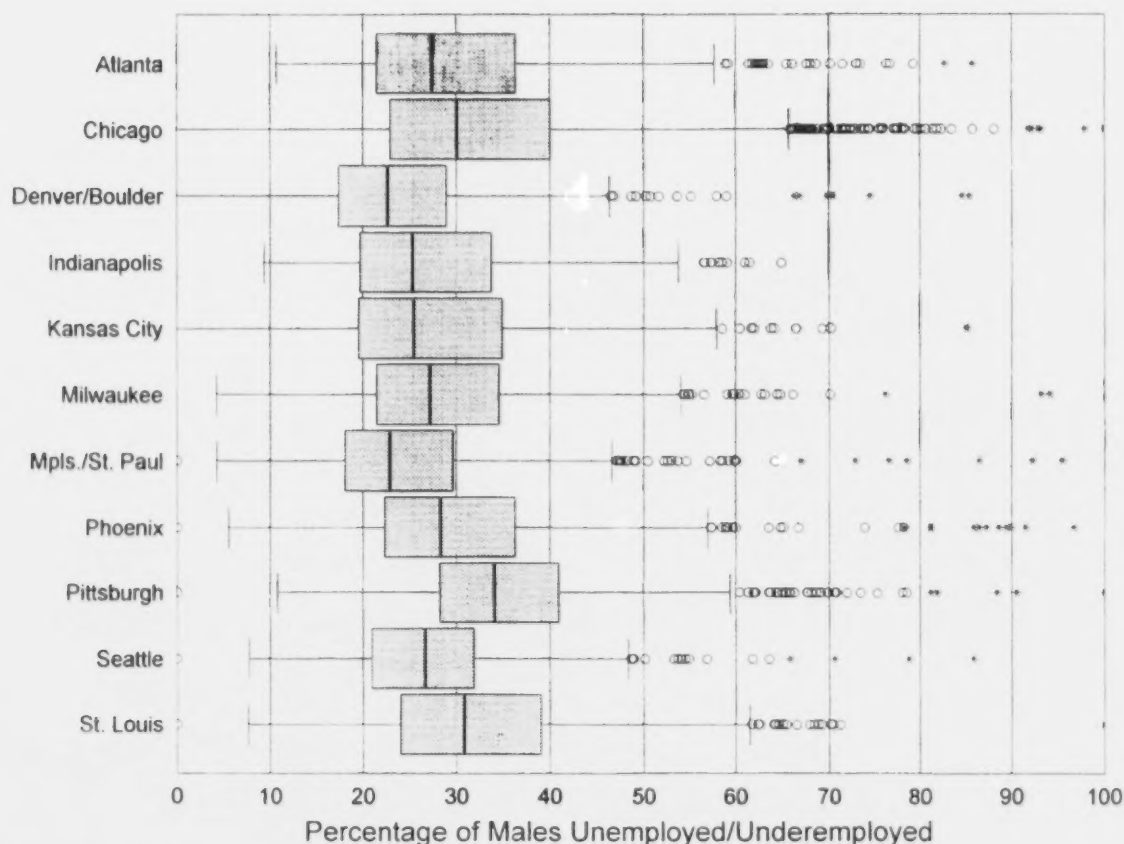
Table 7. Census Tracts With 60 Percent or More of Male Unemployment/
Underemployment, Selected Metropolitan Areas, 1970-90

Metropolitan Areas	Number of Tracts, 1970 (percent)	Number of Tracts, 1980 (percent)	Number of Tracts, 1990 (percent)
Atlanta	8 (2)	24 (7)	19 (5)
Chicago	17 (1)	122 (8)	150 (10)
Denver	3 (<i>< 1</i>)	8 (2)	3 (<i>< 1</i>)
Indianapolis	3 (1)	3 (1)	2 (<i>< 1</i>)
Kansas City	2 (<i>< 1</i>)	11 (3)	20 (5)
Milwaukee	6 (2)	11 (3)	27 (7)
Mpls.-St. Paul	8 (1)	10 (2)	7 (1)
Phoenix	12 (3)	21 (6)	22 (6)
Pittsburgh	5 (<i>< 1</i>)	34 (5)	36 (5)
Seattle	4 (1)	6 (1)	3 (<i>< 1</i>)
St. Louis	1 (<i>< 1</i>)	22 (5)	31 (7)

Source: Urban Institute Under Class Data Base. Calculations by the authors.

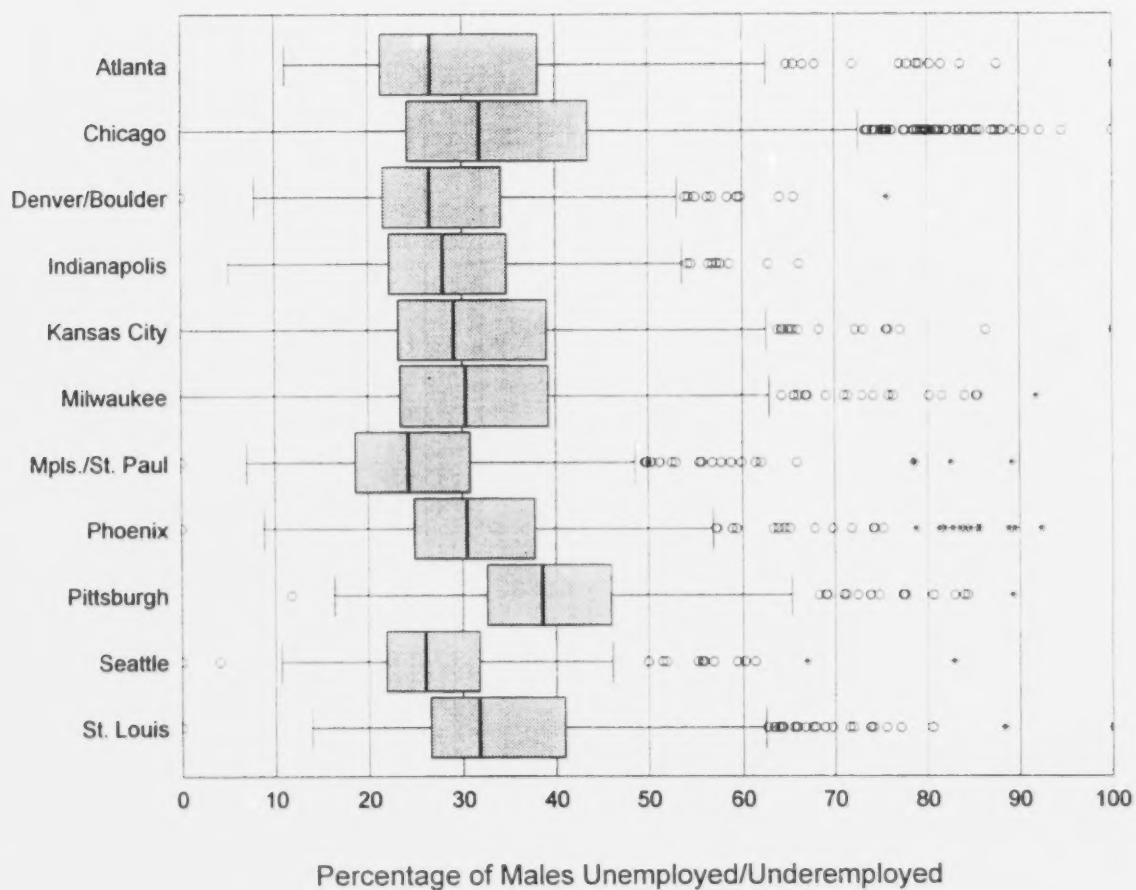
Between 1970 and 1980 median male unemployment/underemployment values for tracts in the eleven metropolitan areas rose in every case by 3 to 7 percent, reaching new highs that ranged from about 23 percent in Denver-Boulder and Minneapolis-St. Paul to almost 35 percent in Pittsburgh (Figure 58). Most striking was the mounting rate of male unemployment/underemployment within impacted areas, as revealed by the sharp increase in the number of tracts with 60 percent or more of working-age males unattached to the labor force. This trend generally slowed down or reversed in the 1980s, although four metropolitan areas—Chicago, Kansas City, Milwaukee, and St. Louis—continued to show a steady increase (Figure 59).

Figure 58. Male Unemployment/Underemployment Rates in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1980



Note: See pages 28-32 for an explanation of how to read this distribution

Figure 59. Male Unemployment/Underemployment Rates in Eleven Metropolitan Areas, 1990



Note: See pages 28-30 for an explanation of how to read this distribution

There is only a partial correspondence between the patterns of high school dropouts and those of unemployed and underemployed males. In Atlanta, for example, the inner-city concentration of males not in the labor force matches, to some degree, a parallel pattern of concentration of high school dropouts. But in the outer suburbs, where high dropout rates are also found, there are almost no examples of tracts with high rates of male unemployment and underemployment (Figure 60). In the Chicago area the same is true, with tracts displaying high dropout rates scattered throughout the city and many of the suburbs, but with the high rates of male unemployment and underemployment confined primarily to the inner-city poverty areas described earlier (Figure 61). Most of the other metropolitan areas display variations on the same themes: widely scattered tracts with significant dropout rates, with a concentration of such tracts in the central-city poverty areas, while tracts with concentrations of unemployed/underemployed males are primarily confined to the poverty areas in cities (Figures 62-70).

The number of Minneapolis-St. Paul area tracts with more than a 60 percent male unemployment/underemployment rate reached ten in 1980, then dropped to seven in 1990. The Denver, Indianapolis, and Seattle metropolitan areas had smaller numbers of tracts with extreme rates of this trait in 1990, while the other metropolitan areas registered several times the total number and rate of the Twin Cities. Chicago topped out the group at 150 tracts, representing 10 percent of the tracts in the Chicago metropolitan area.

Figure 60. Male Unemployment/Underemployment, Atlanta, 1970-90

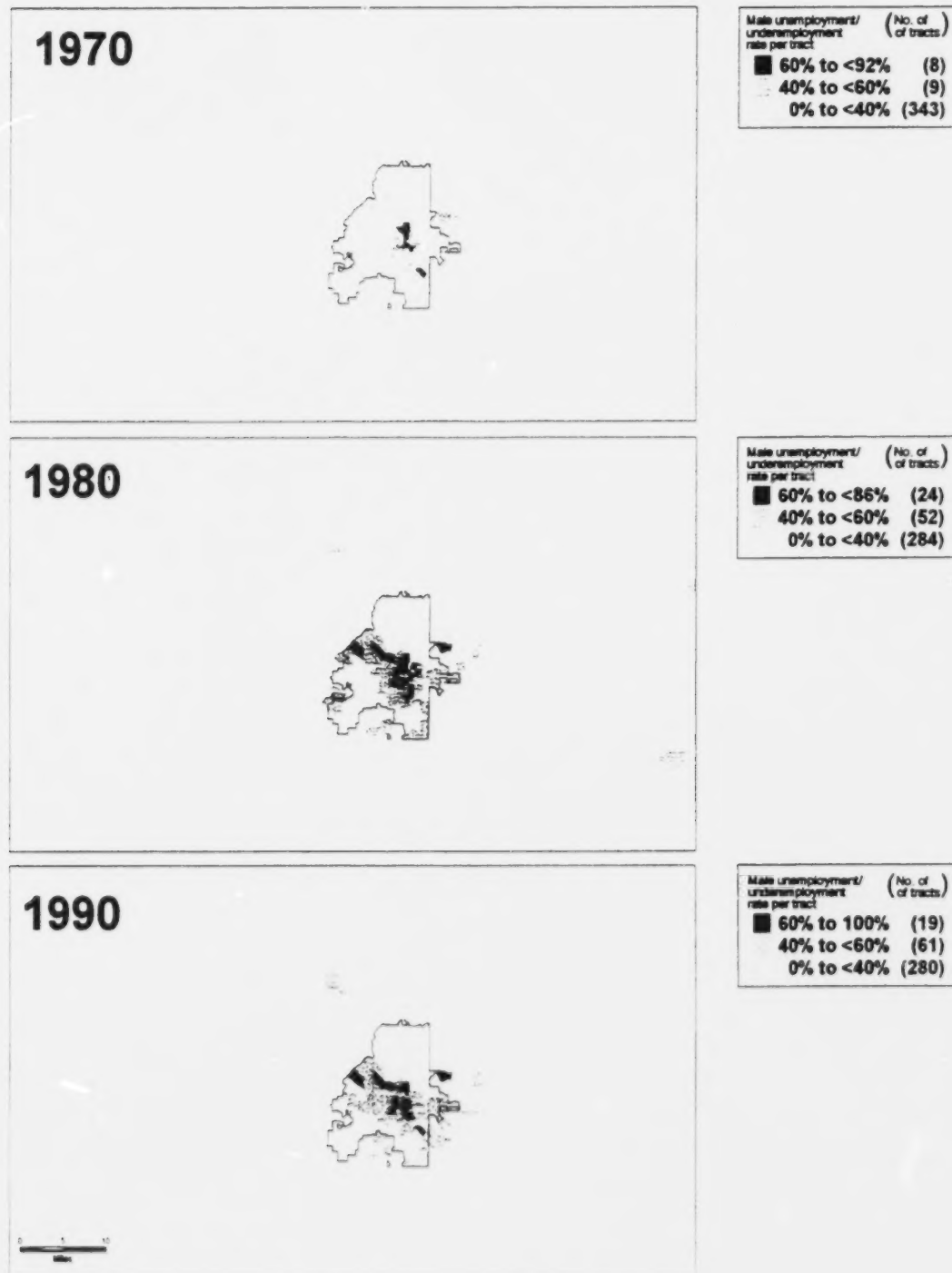


Figure 61. Male Unemployment/Underemployment, Chicago, 1970-90

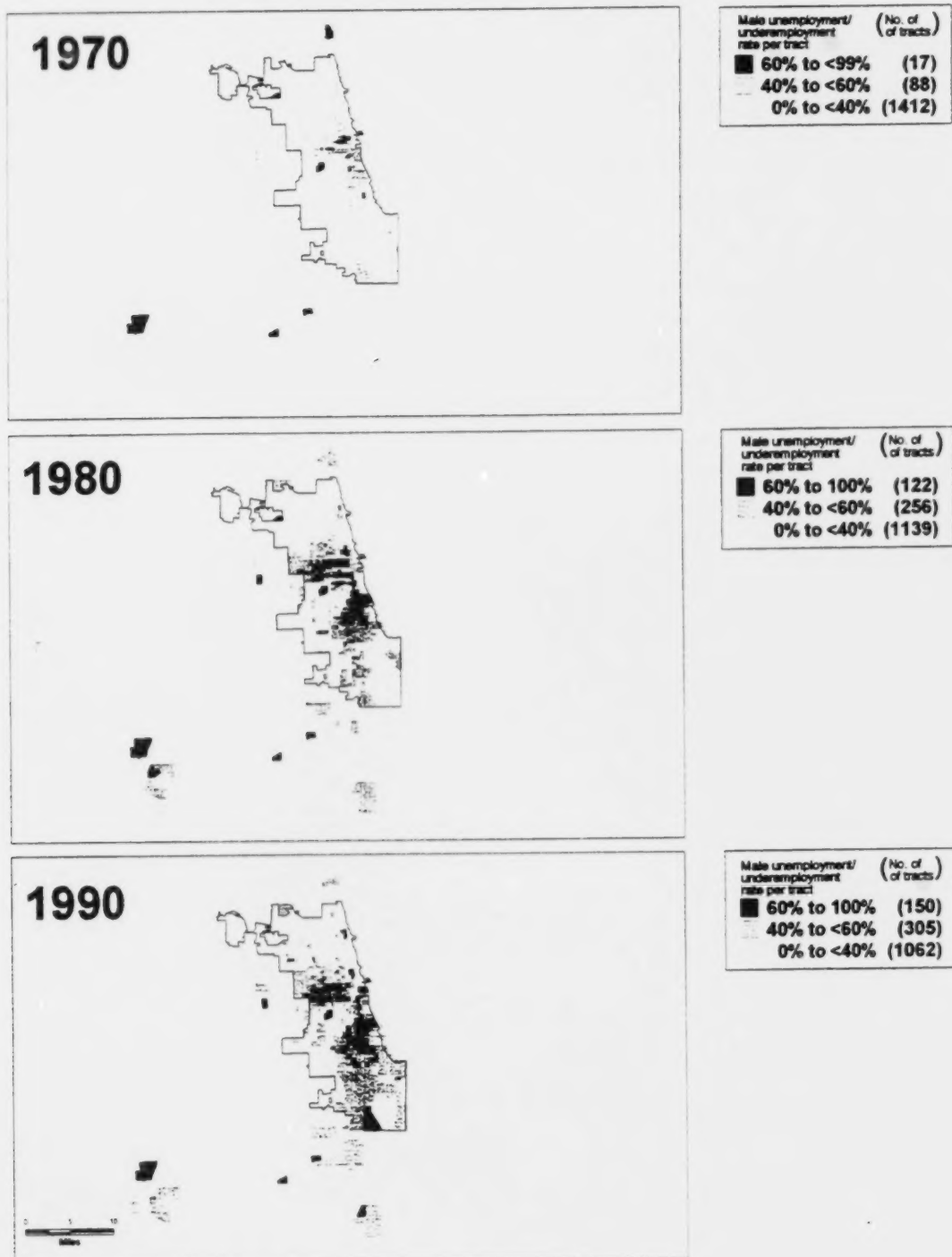


Figure 62. Male Unemployment/Underemployment, Denver, 1970-90

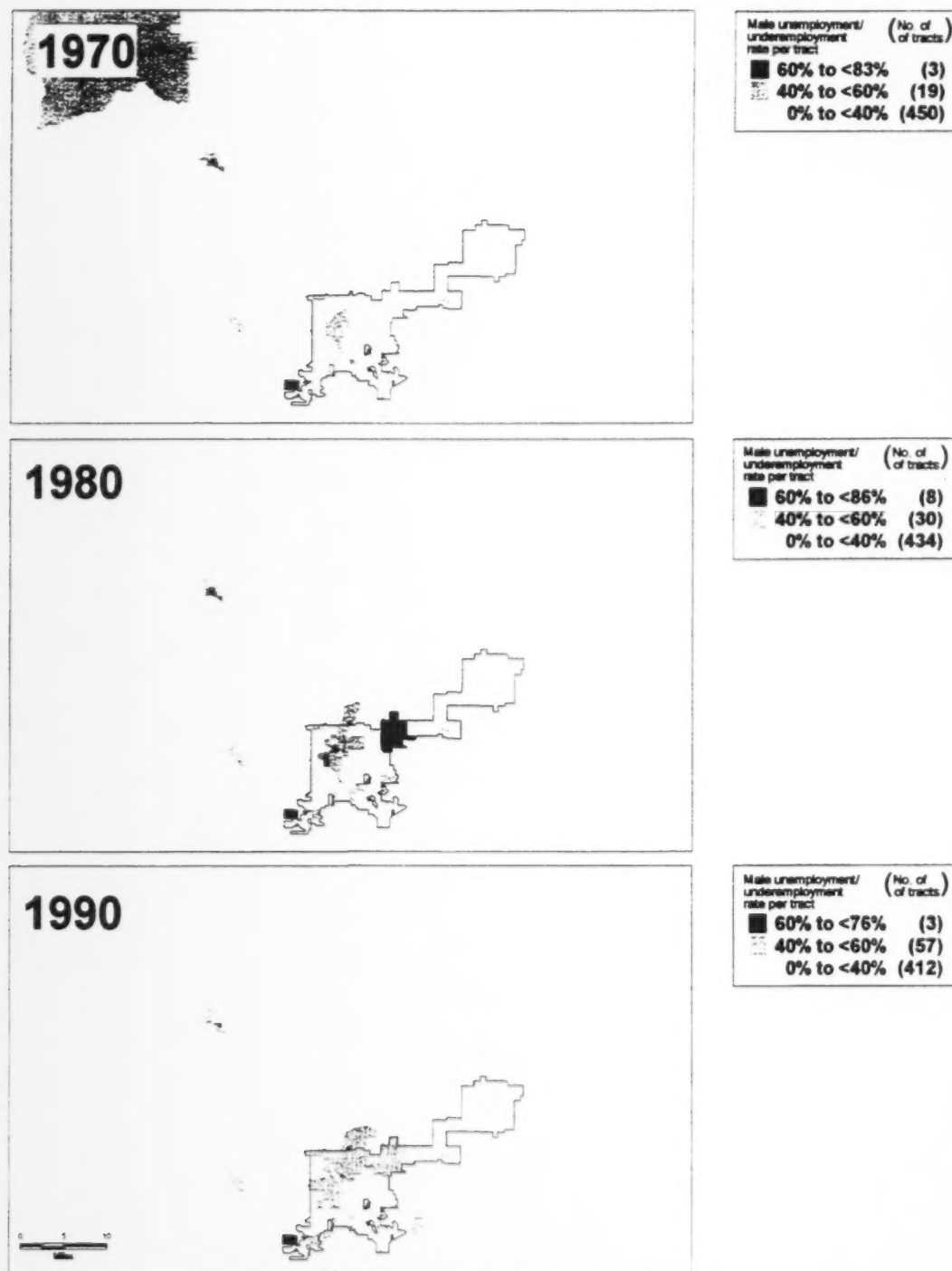


Figure 63. Male Unemployment/Underemployment, Indianapolis, 1970-90

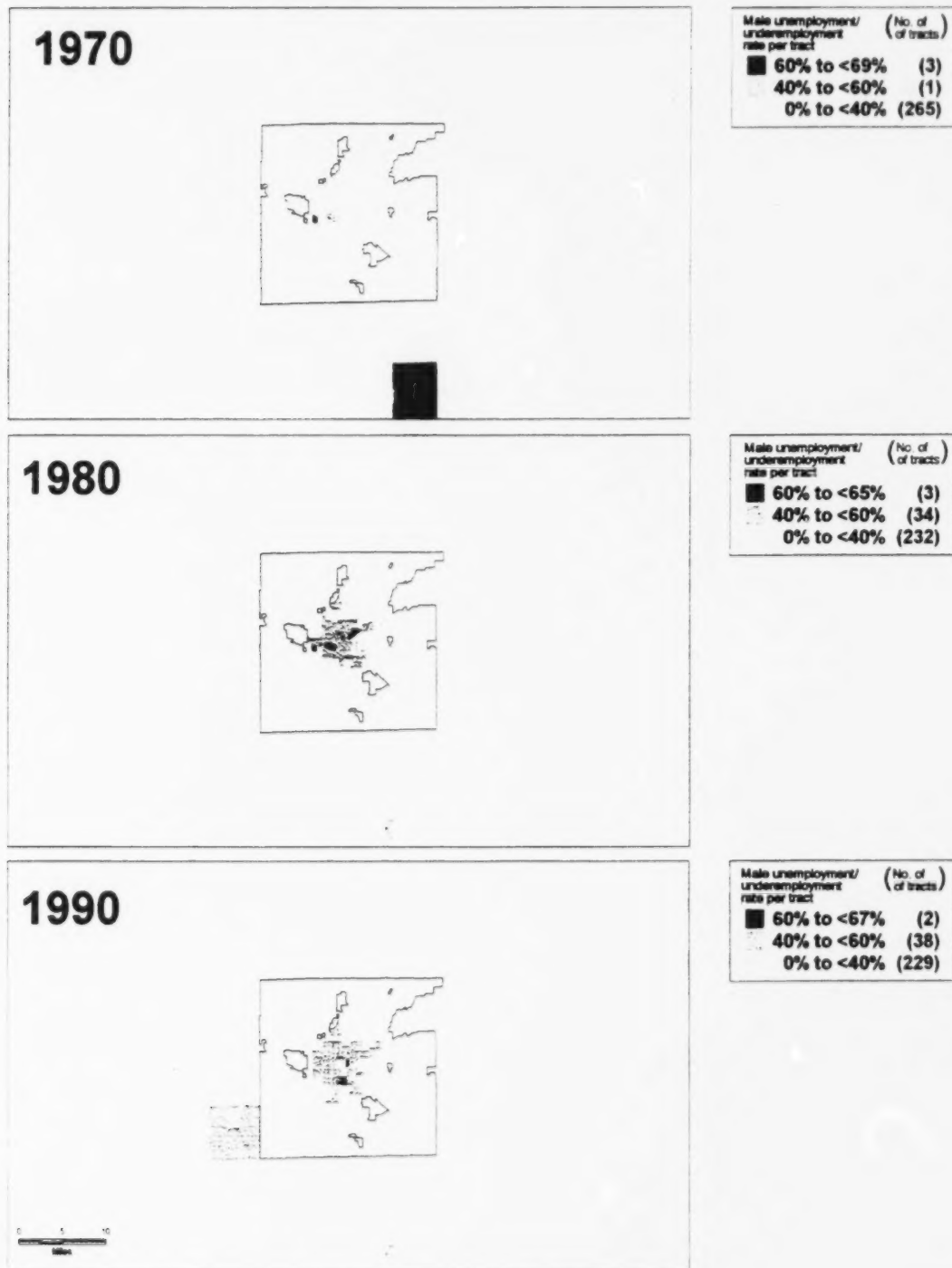


Figure 64. Male Unemployment/Underemployment, Kansas City, 1970-90

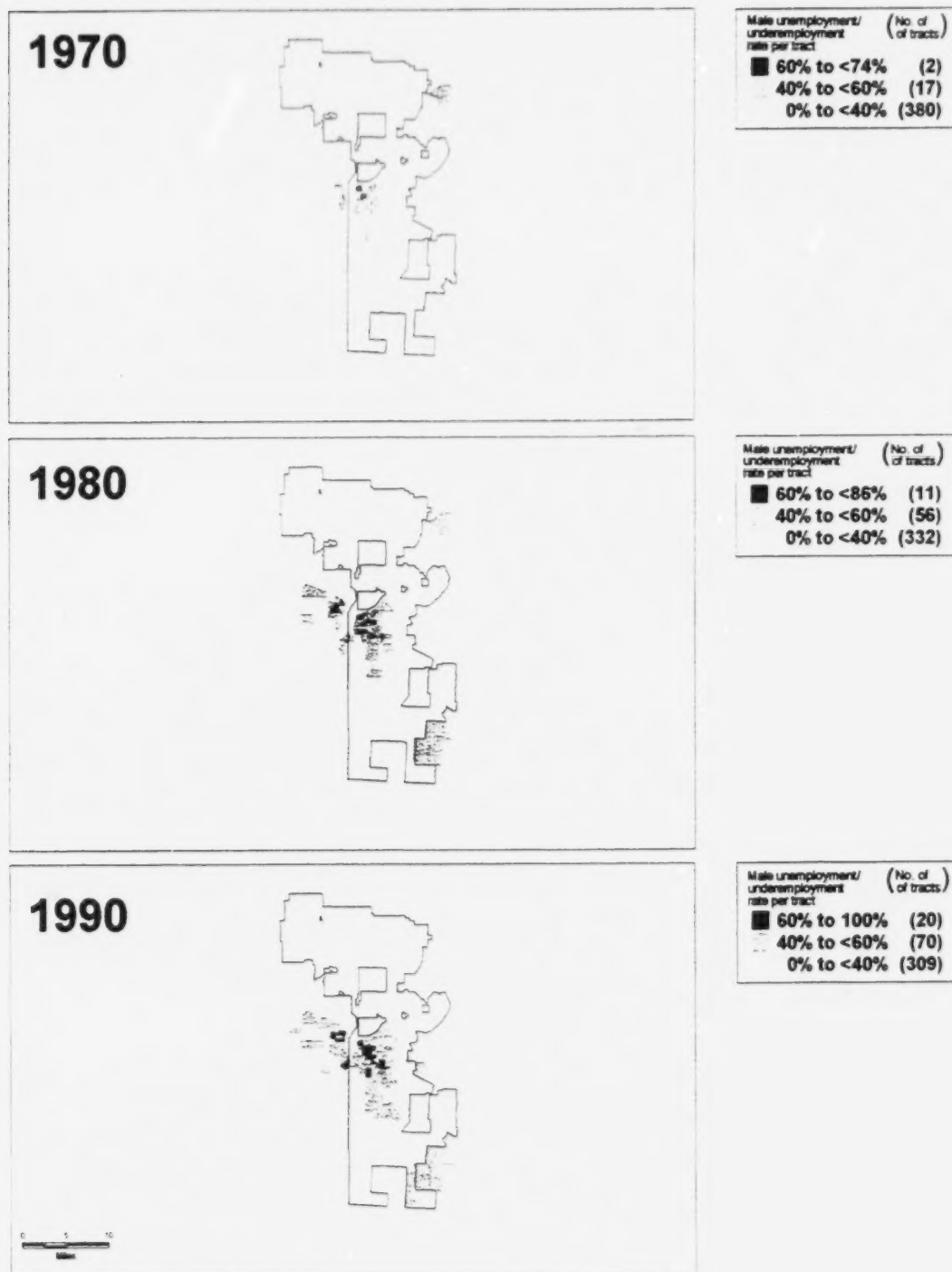


Figure 65. Male Unemployment/Underemployment, Milwaukee, 1970-90

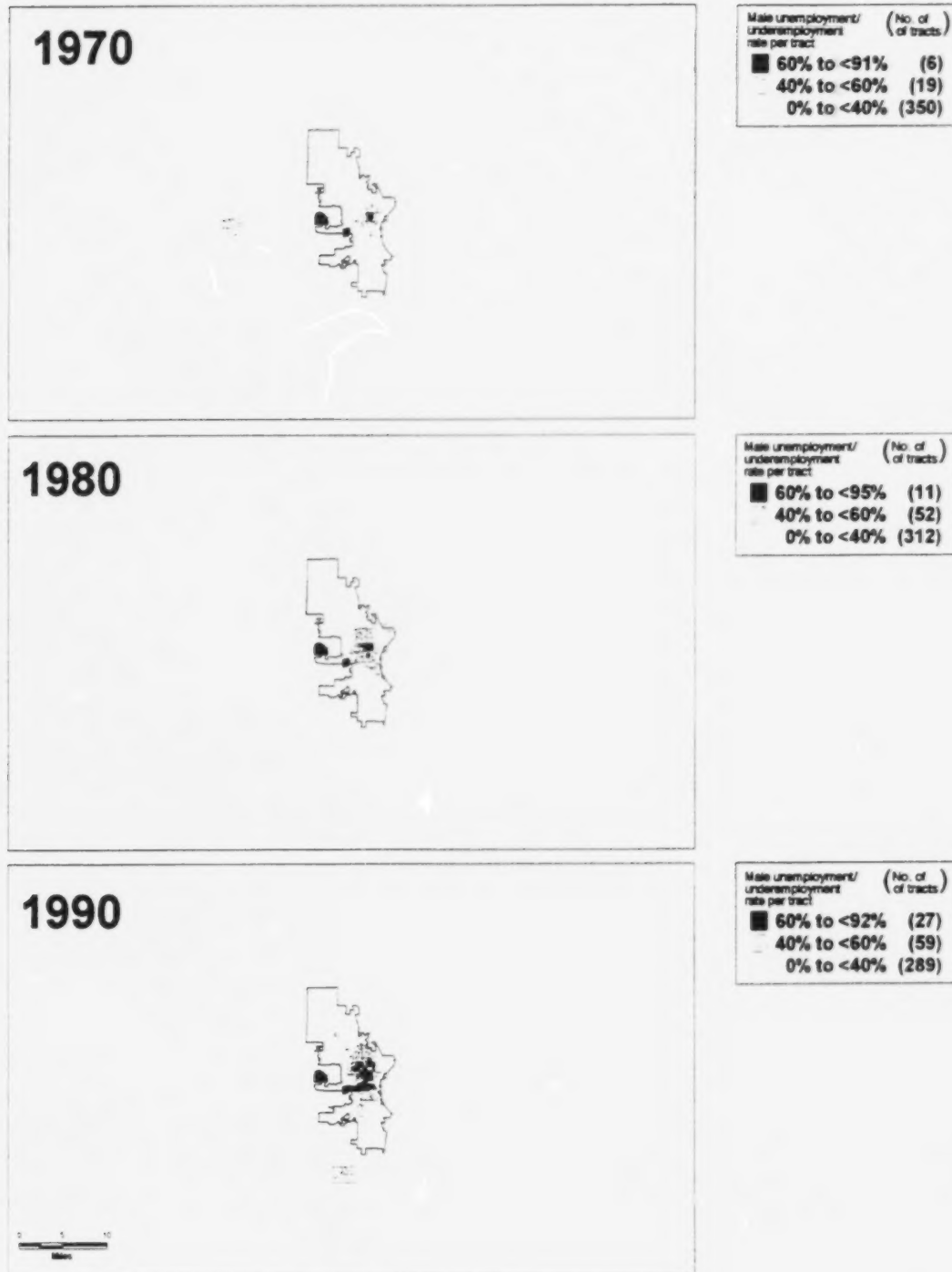


Figure 66. Male Unemployment/Underemployment, Minneapolis-St. Paul, 1970-90

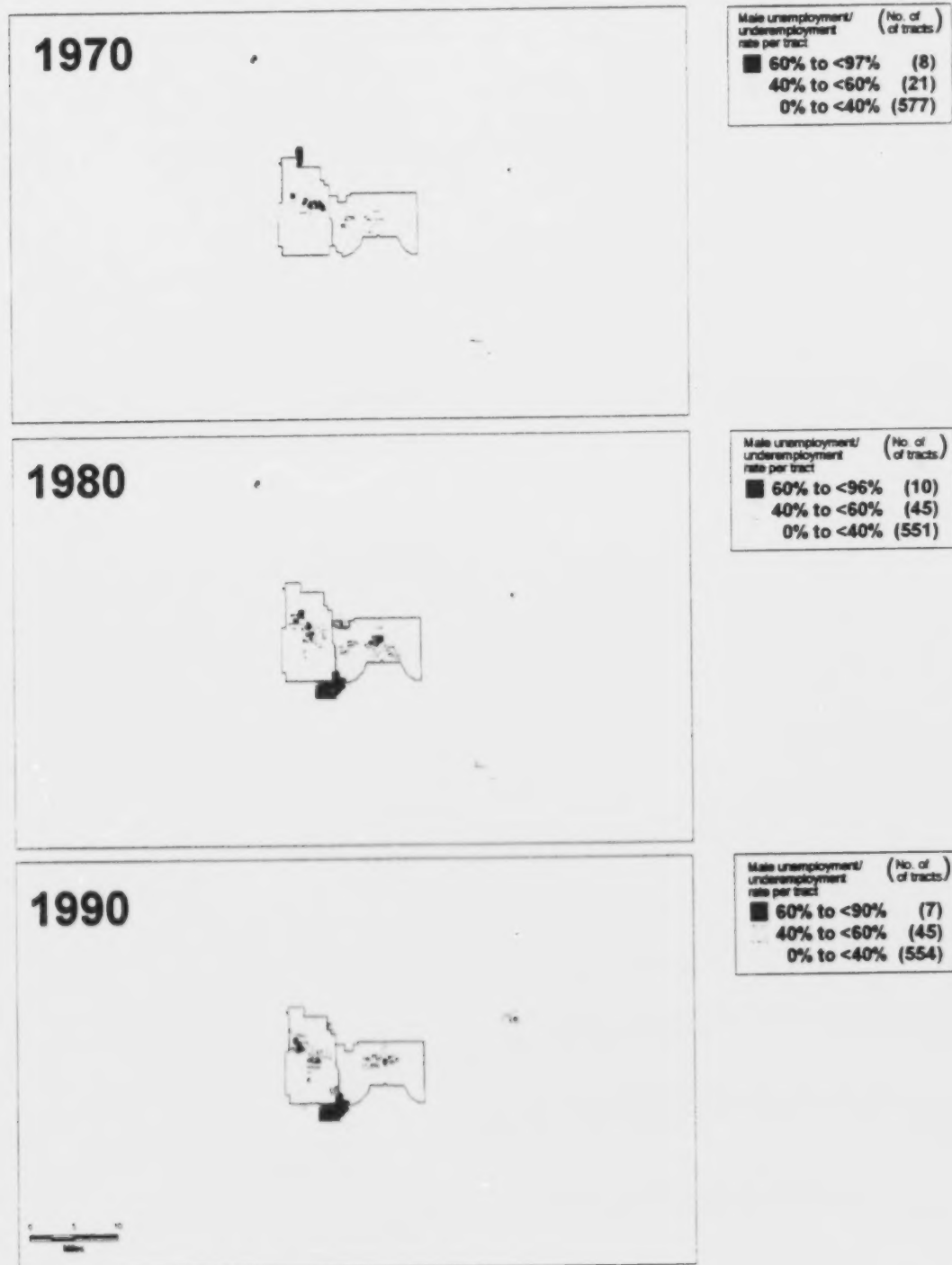


Figure 67. Male Unemployment/Underemployment, Phoenix, 1970-90

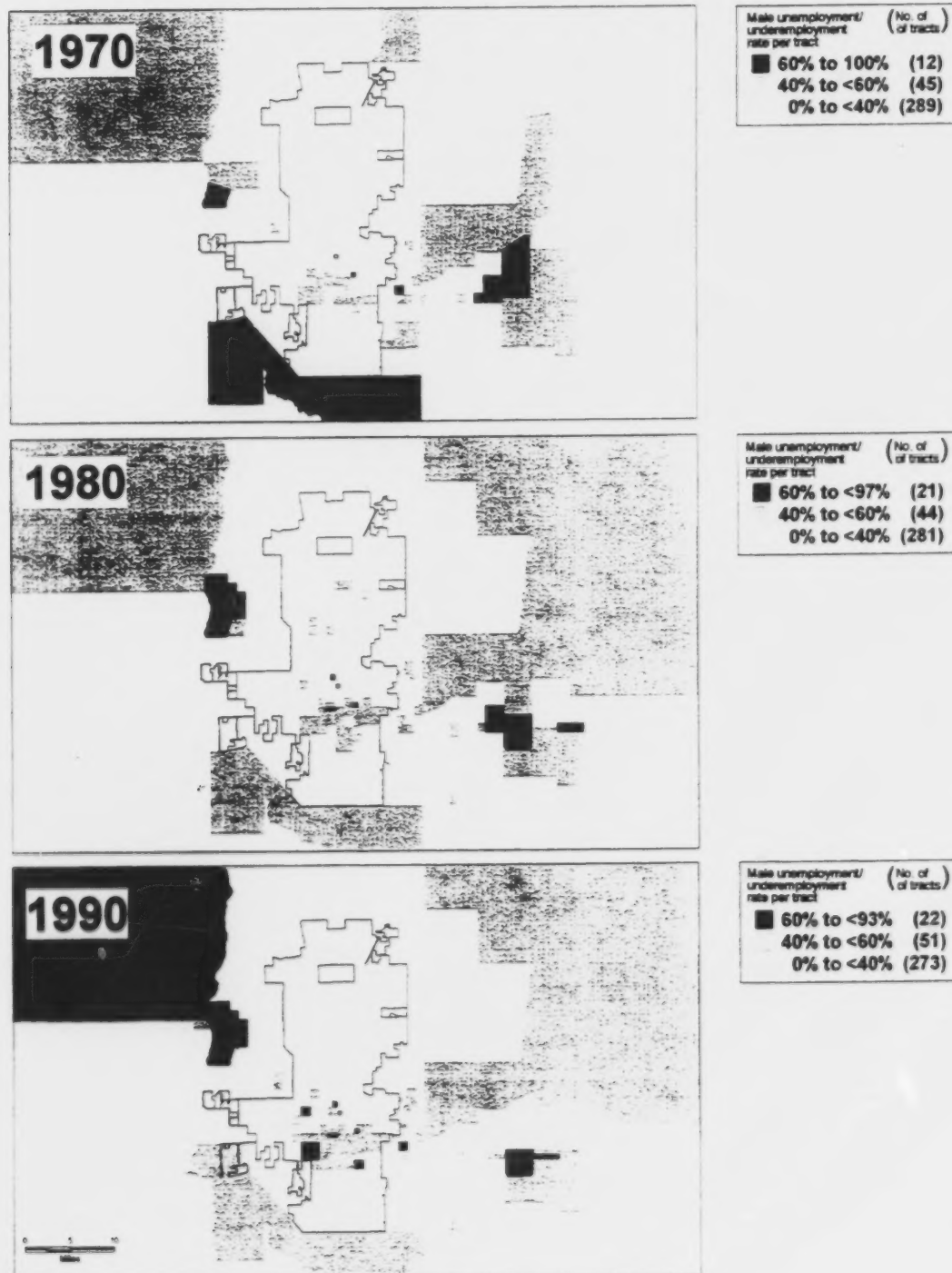


Figure 68. Male Unemployment/Underemployment, Pittsburgh, 1970-90

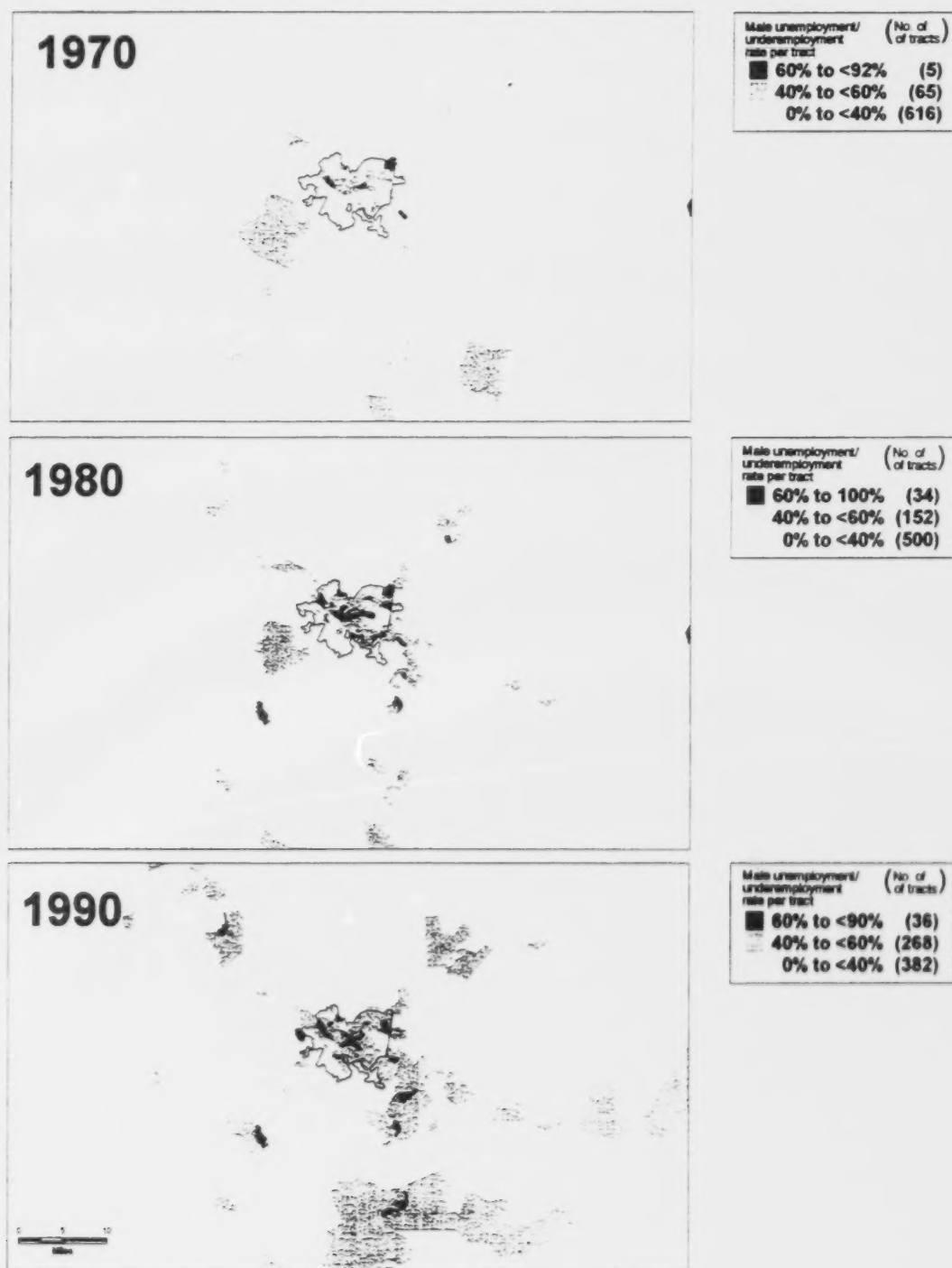


Figure 69. Male Unemployment/Underemployment, Seattle, 1970-90

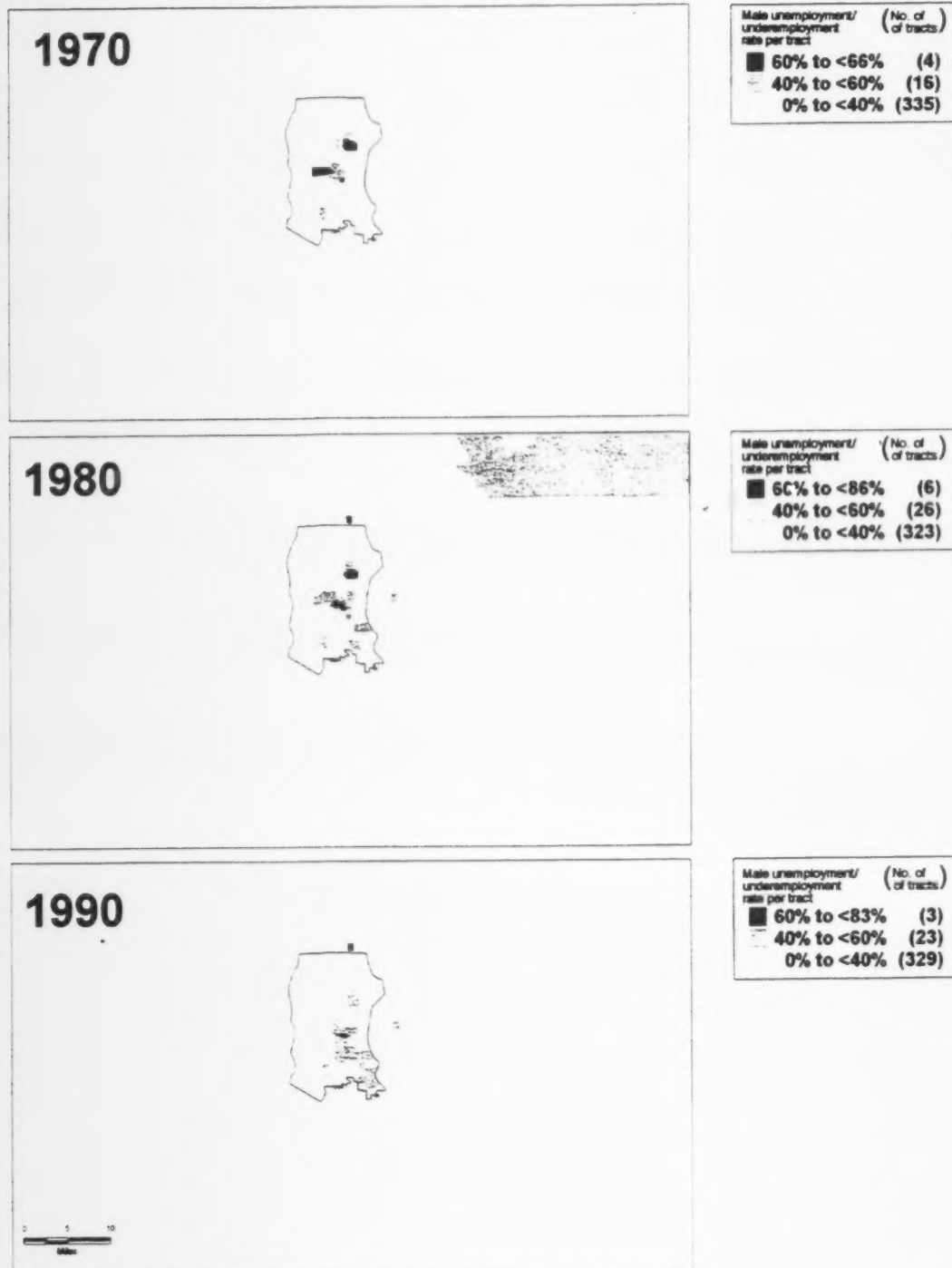
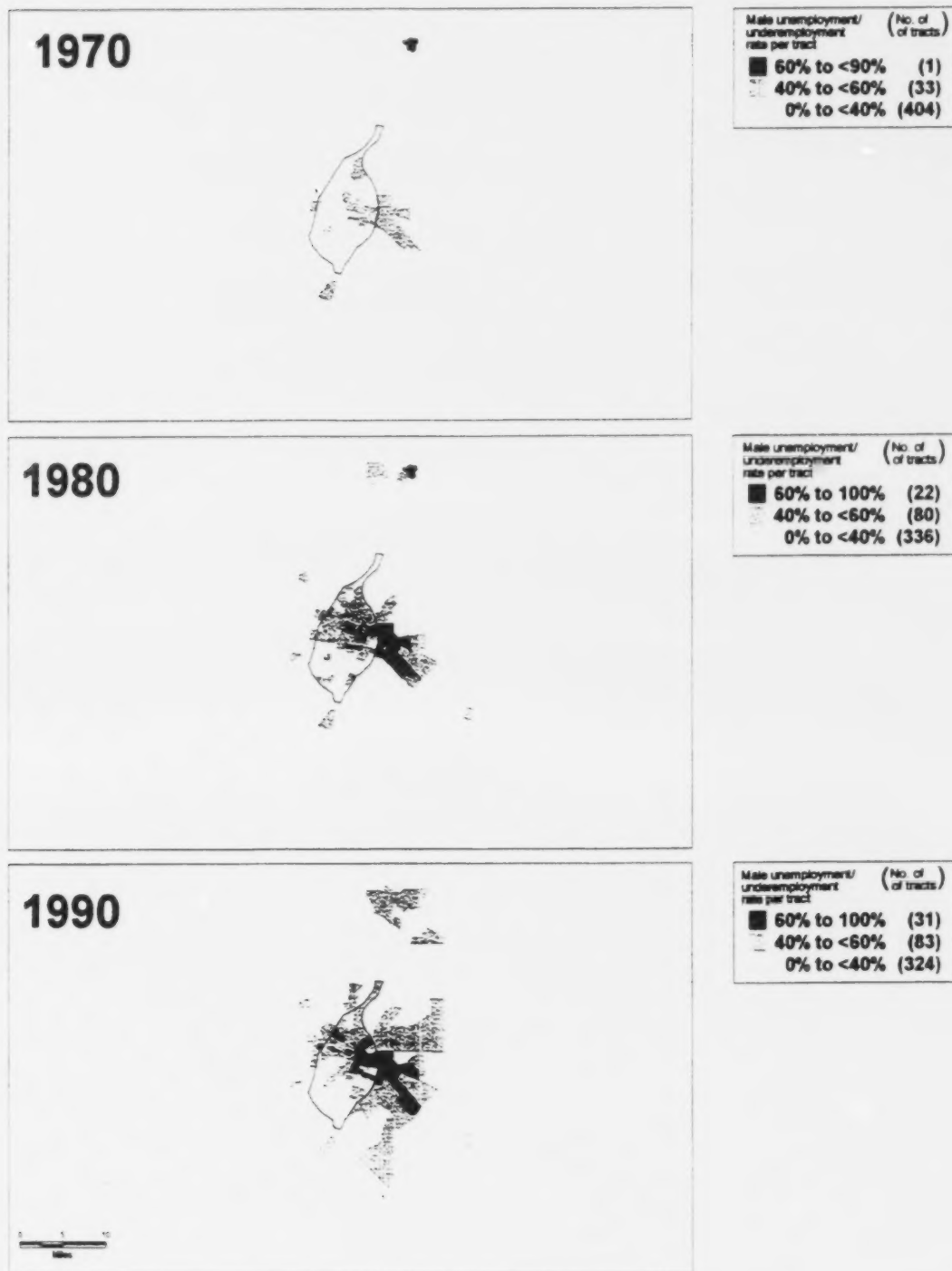


Figure 70. Male Unemployment/Underemployment, St. Louis, 1970-90



Summary: Eleven Metropolitan Areas Compared

How does the Twin Cities area compare with other metropolitan areas in respect to rates of increase and geographical concentrations of poverty, public assistance dependency, female-headed families and subfamilies, high school dropouts, and male labor force attachment? The answer depends on the measure and the areas being compared.

Poverty

Minneapolis and St. Paul are small cities within a sprawling metropolitan area of about 5,000 square miles. In 1970 six tracts at three different locations—two in Minneapolis and one in St. Paul—displayed extreme poverty rates, some up to 60 percent. In 1980 that number had risen to eleven tracts, and by 1990 the count had reached thirty, which was 5 percent of all tracts in the metropolitan statistical area. The Twin Cities rate of increase in extreme poverty tracts was neither the fastest nor the slowest growing among the MSAs we compared, but fell somewhere in the middle of the group.

Public Assistance

The number of Twin Cities area tracts with high rates of households drawing public assistance is about average. However, in other metropolitan areas with average rates, the number of such tracts is stable or dropping. In this regard, the Twin Cities area is strikingly different, showing a steady increase in the number of such tracts. The gross comparisons we have made did not indicate whether this result is due to liberal criteria for determining welfare eligibility in Minnesota, or to an attractive employment situation in the Twin Cities that draws in-migrants faster than they can be absorbed and employed, or to the distribution of low-priced housing opportunities that disproportionately concentrate populations receiving public assistance, or to social and economic circumstances in other metropolitan areas that keep their totals lower than the Twin Cities, or to other factors or combinations of factors. The fact remains, though, that the Twin Cities have recently experienced an unusually fast rate of growth in the number of tracts with high levels of public assistance clientele.

Female-headed Families and Subfamilies

By 1990 the national average of families and subfamilies that were headed by females reached 16.5 percent. Median tract values in the eleven areas included in this study were between 20 and 30 percent in all but three: the Twin Cities, Pittsburgh, and Seattle. The spreads between the 25th and 75th percentiles were greatest in Atlanta, Chicago, and Milwaukee; and smallest in the Twin Cities (18), Phoenix (15), and Seattle (13). Tracts in which more than 70 percent of families were headed by women were common in all areas except Phoenix and Seattle. Twin Cities patterns were comparable to the other areas. While the median tract average of female-headed families and subfamilies was lowest in the Twin Cities and Seattle, Twin Cities trends moved in the same direction as in other areas.

Dropouts and Male Unemployment/Underemployment

The Twin Cities area does not really stand out in comparisons of high school dropout rates and male unemployment/underemployment rates, whether those comparisons are being made with similar metropolitan areas or with those significantly different in important respects. In the case of the labor force measure, the number of Twin Cities tracts with extremely high rates of unemployment/underemployment is far below average. Like almost all of the other metropolitan areas included in this study, the Twin Cities had a very low percentage of census tracts where high school dropout rates exceeded 50 percent. The only metropolitan area with more than 1 percent of such tracts was Chicago.

Conclusions from the Data Analysis

We conclude that how the Twin Cities area compares with other metropolitan areas in respect to rates of increase and geographical concentrations of poverty, subscription to public assistance, female-headed families and subfamilies, high school dropouts, and male unemployment and underemployment depends on the measure used and the areas being compared. The rate of increase in the number of tracts with high rates of public assistance dependency is well above average, but the reasons are unclear. The rate in a tract can rise because the dependent population is increasing fast and is concentrated geographically, or because it is easy for better-off households to depart, leaving behind higher concentrations of needy households, or both. On the other measures of levels or of rates of change the Twin Cities area appears average or below average.

Rates of change in public dependency have been greater in the Twin Cities than in other areas recently perhaps, ironically, because the relative prosperity of the area has drawn many migrants in search of better lives. This trend may support the argument that we are catching up with other metropolitan areas on the measures in question, although the ultimate consequences of the trends might be different here than they have been elsewhere. The more important questions that we should be asking are: What do the trends mean? At what point do we declare our cities to be in decline? If we have a constant, large influx of poor households who arrive, improve their situation, and move out of poverty, then a certain set of policies and resources is required. If the numbers reflect a static population of chronically poor, then that is a different matter. The public debate should differentiate between these two situations. We should ask: what is the standard of urban vitality and quality of life for all to which we should compare our current conditions?

Beyond questions of metropolitan area-wide vitality, policy responses must address the disproportionate share of poverty and related problems that is concentrated in the central cities. The fact that the two cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul cover only about 2 percent of the total metropolitan area means that troubled zones near the cores cover a substantial fraction of the total areas of these central cities, but only a small fraction of the entire metropolitan area. Thus, to the extent that problems within those troubled districts require a public response, the resources of the central cities themselves will be inadequate. Troubled areas at the core are symptoms of metropolitan area-wide problems and call for metropolitan area-wide and state-sponsored solutions.

If and when we do declare our cities to be on a dangerous path, one tradition that the Twin Cities and the State of Minnesota can claim with pride is a creative and original

approach to problem solving. If previous approaches to problems in other urban areas have failed, then we should invent new approaches.

Urban Decline and Public Policy

Since the shift in federal policy that began in 1980, the economic importance of cities to the national economy has been undervalued, and the role of cities as efficient sites of production undermined. The social consequences of this change have fallen most heavily upon the most vulnerable: upon women and children, the working poor, and the growing numbers of chronically unemployed and underemployed. The more generalized, widespread impacts of the relative decline of cities have been felt by all of us as the nation has become increasingly challenged in the global marketplace, and the economic well-being of virtually everyone in the country has consequently suffered.

Today, as was true decades ago, the long-term consequences of inner-city decline—of the formation of impacted ghettos in most large cities—are little understood and form only a small part of the public debate. Current public concern and backlash are focused on the immediate consequences of this decline: rising crime rates, deteriorating housing stock and infrastructure, failing schools, and increasing numbers of people dependent upon public resources at a time when resources are increasingly scarce. Policy responses have been largely ineffectual and often counterproductive, aimed most often at placating public anxiety. The federal government, until 1992, remained aloof. Only under the current administration has it refocused some attention on urban problems; to what end remains to be seen. Many state governments continue to be embroiled in metropolitan-vs.-upstate/outstate/downstate/non-metropolitan competition and conflicts. Resources available to local governments have fallen short of needs as the national economy has slowed, and the recent political climate has discouraged efforts to raise funds through taxation, particularly funds meant to aid what the majority of working- and middle-class citizens view as a not necessarily deserving population.

One barometer of the growing distress of cities is the frequent appearance over the last decade of "places rated" guides, in which cities are ranked for their livability on the basis of such factors as low crime rates, good schools, low taxes, plentiful jobs, and trustworthy, responsible local governments. In a previous era, one could count on finding all of these features in most larger cities. Today, people feel the need to shop for livable places as carefully as for their first home.

None of these developments bodes well for the future of the nation, whether viewed in political, economic, social, or moral terms. At the moment, inner-city problems are viewed as local, affecting mostly city residents, with some overspill to nearby suburbs. Thus, local governments are held largely responsible for solving their own problems while having inadequate jurisdiction and resources to do so. Regional government is rare in this country, and where it exists, it usually is in conflict with its constituent or subordinate units. Without a

concerted national approach to turning cities around, without an explicit recognition of the national consequences of central-city decline and all that it entails and an accompanying assault on its causes, the consequences inevitably will broaden and deepen and edge closer to irreversibility.

There is a growing public consensus in the United States that strong measures must be taken soon to halt the growth of urban poverty concentrations. In contrast to assistance programs of the 1960s, however, there has been a shift in the ostensible rationale behind these policy initiatives. The earlier impulse to help the deserving poor, fanned by the political idealism of the 1960s, now has become an impulse of self-protection and self-interest, centering on what many regard to be a more cost-effective distribution of public resources. The American electorate is asserting its right to stop incurring the public costs of declining central cities.

Urban policy will have to balance the interests of this concerned public and the population that is living in poverty in troubled areas. Policy goals must include provision of a minimum living standard for food, shelter, medical care, and education for all citizens, while at the same time minimizing social disorder in order to protect the population from crime and to reproduce a productive work force and citizenry. In all of the decades that there have been poor people in cities, policymakers never have quite figured out just how to accomplish these goals. An appropriate, effective policy response will depend upon understanding both the nature of the problems, and what sorts of measures would be effective to combat them. At this juncture, we fully understand neither.

Useful Directions for Further Research

The one thing that is clear from an examination of these data is that we have far too little information and understanding of the phenomena in question on which to be basing policy initiatives. Better understanding is needed of the linkages between global capitalism and the fates of individuals and households. We know something about processes of change at the metropolitan, state, national, and global levels, and we know that somehow these changes have had impacts on households and individuals in inner cities. But we know little about what has been called the mediating role of the neighborhood and settlement patterns. The measures under study are observed at people's places of residence; they are found in concentration because in American cities residential structure is highly segregated by class, race, and ethnicity. We need to know much more about the dynamics of the housing market and the links between residential structure and concentrations of poverty and other social problems. This understanding can only be accomplished by examining the problem at a more local scale and by involving the people under study in the research.

Other sorts of data are needed in order to fully understand the processes leading to chronic poverty and its associated social problems. We need more qualitative data to explain the numbers. We need information from below the tract level; we need the life stories of the

Conclusions

people who live in chronic poverty to understand the processes that got them there and keep them there. A place-based approach, with emphasis on the links between localities and the broad structural changes taking place in American society, would go far in revealing appropriate, effective policy options.

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